

FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACCULTURATION OF SAUDI FEMALE DOCTORAL  
STUDENTS IN A U.S. MID-WESTERN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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To the supporting factors of my study abroad experience

My diamond dependents, Osama and Nader and Lara Kokandy,

My loving family, Mama, Baba, AnaJon and the Bar Kids,

My generous institutional support, Dr. Don Hossler,

My proud home culture, Saudi Arabia,

I am forever grateful to Allah for all your blessed presence in my life.

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The purpose of this study is to examine the factors affecting the acculturation process of the Saudi female doctoral students in the US. Documenting the adjustment process is a first step in providing an understanding of the Saudi female doctoral student acculturation during their academic journey in the US. According to Berry's 1997 Acculturation Model, student sojourners either assimilate, integrate, separate or marginalize (Berry 1997, p. 10). The study used qualitative methods to identify self-reported factors that affected the adjustment of the Saudi doctoral students. Thirteen doctoral female students from Saudi Arabia were interviewed on their perceptions of their adjustment experiences while studying in the US. Determining the factors that affected their adjustment and identifying their acculturation modes help educational stakeholders better prepare for this population. Understanding the student's home societal and cultural aspects can also help the stakeholders reduce the effect of factors that may lead to less favorable adjustment experiences.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction to the Study**

#### **Introduction**

Millions of students from all over the world travel from one country to live in another with a goal to gain an education. In 2014, The United States (U.S.), the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia were the top countries that receive the most number of international students from around the world. According to the Institute of International Education, the U.S. alone hosted around half of the world's international students; approximately 886,052 (Institute of International Education, 2014). During the first International Education Week (IEW) briefing in 2000, the reported number of international students in the U.S. grew by 72% and specifically the report stated that the number of Saudi students increased ten times (Institute of International Education, 2014). Since 2011, the Saudi student population maintained a consistent place within the list of the top four countries with students studying in the U.S. The Saudi student representation on U.S. campuses made up 6% of the total international student population. By 2015, of all the Saudi students studying abroad around the world, 59,945 (around 43%) were in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2015).

Although the presence of Saudi students in the U.S. was not new, visible increase in numbers started in 2005. The noticeable increase started after the Saudi government initiated a merit-based financial assistance program: The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP). After the program started, the population of Saudi students that studied in the U.S. and around the world experienced sustained annual growth. According to the 2013 Saudi Higher Education

Statistics Center (HESC), there were approximately 141,223 Saudi students around the world, and around 45% of them were Saudi females (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The Saudi students were not the only student populations that were growing as study abroad students; student mobility increased all around the world in the past years. With the increase in student mobility, issues on culture shock and adjustment challenges emerged in the area of the international student study abroad experience. Study abroad students move from their familiar home culture to their new destination which is their host culture. Differences and similarities that exist between the student's home culture and their new host culture had an impact on the student's adjustment process (Berry, 1997). An increase of challenges was predicted when wide cultural gaps existed between the home and host societies. Different examples of cultural characteristics like different beliefs, traditions, cuisine and even social expressions were observed to complicate adjustment experiences. In the literature on international students, acculturation is referred to the experience when moving between cultures. Students acculturate in different ways after they move from their home culture and settle in a different culture. The acculturation process relates to the personal, social and cultural changes. Changes usually happen when a person already developed in one cultural context migrates to a new place with a different culture (Berry, 1997). According to Berry's Acculturation Model (1997), several factors influence a student's adjustment process. Within the context of this study, the focus was on the factors that affect the student's acculturation experience as they try to adjust to their new environment.

Chapter 1 was organized into several sections. First, two popular theoretically derived models relevant to the acculturation process are introduced. The following section examined the Saudi female student's motivation to study in the U.S. It also presented previous related research

drawn from the literature. The chapter ended with an explanation of the importance of the study followed by an overview of the research questions.

## **Background**

Although adopting a balanced method of sharing equal values from the two cultures was portrayed in the literature as a logical and appropriate strategy to succeed in a new environment, several emerging studies and models indicated the presence of other different strategies. John Berry was a scholar who studied the behavior of migration for many years and as a result introduced an acculturation model used to predict the experiences and behaviors of migrants (Berry, 1997). Acculturation, according to Berry (1997), is defined by the experiences of an individual that seeks a consensus to balance (or not) the values acquired from the home environment beliefs versus the beliefs of the new host environment. In his model, Berry defined four different modes of acculturation: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration.

Gertrude Hofstede was another scholar that created a model related to the study of international students. Hofstede's Model of National Culture (Hofstede, 2003) focuses on the cultural differences between nations according to the preferred behaviors of each nations' members (Hofstede, 2003). The model measures a nations' cultural characteristics according to six different dimensions. The six dimensions are: (1) the power distance index (PDI), (2) the individual versus collectivism (IDV), (3) masculinity versus femininity (MAS), (4) uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), (5) long-term versus short-term orientation (LTO), and (6) indulgence vs resistance (IND). Chapter 2 discussed in detail Berry's Acculturation Model and Hofstede's National Cultural Model.

Previous studies suggested there are variations in the student's adjustment experiences. Berry (1997) noted that moving along the acculturation continuum, sojourners vary in the extent

they accept and follow the behavior of the host culture members and ignore their home culture values. Students may experience one acculturation mode or more than one mode during their adjustment experience. Study abroad experiences posted on social media platforms emphasizes Berry's statement that students may experience more than one acculturation mode as they attempt to adjust. It is therefore incorrect to assume that positive adjustment experiences are associated only with assimilation (Sandekian et al., 2015, p. 2).

One of the study abroad student groups that were often overlooked in the literature and therefore merit further investigation were the growing group of Saudi female doctoral students. The literature highlighted several reasons on why there is a limited presence of research related to Saudi female students in the literature on international students. Hershberger and Farber (2008) pointed to cultural constraints as the reason behind the difficulties Saudi females face while studying in the U.S. and the reason behind the lack of related literature (Hershberger and Farber, 2008, p. 5). Hamdan (2005) emphasized the presence of cultural constraint in her study on the engagement of Saudi female students in online classes. Students did not engage to avoid cultural shame associated with breaking cultural norms. The cultural restraints were a barrier to the female students' productive engagement (Hamdan, 2005). In some cases, home culture values were an obstacle in benefiting from the host society. Hamdan states that the presence of an obstacle was especially true when values of the host culture conflicted with the home culture (2005). The presence of a large cultural gap between the home and host culture was reported in the literature as one of the main reasons behind adjustment difficulties. In the case of the Saudi and the U.S. cultures, many cultural differences existed between the two countries. Pipa and Inglehart (2002) stated that the cultural gap between Western and Islamic societies comes from gender inequity and liberalization issues. According to Alharthi (2005), there was "a growing

cultural gap, with Islamic nations remaining the most traditional societies in the world" (p. 11).

### **Rationale for Study**

For the past couple of years, there had been visible development in areas related to education and economy in Saudi Arabia. In 2005, the initiation of the King Abdullah Scholarship program emphasized quality education as a value within the Saudi community. In 2016, quality education and practical training were both stated as essential community values when Saudi announced its 2030 Vision. The Vision highlighted the country's movement from an oil-dependent economy to an economy that depends on the expertise of its human resources. The 2030 Vision emphasized the role of knowledge and expertise of both Saudi men and women to produce human capital that leads a thriving economy (Vision 2030, 2016). For her role to be as effective as stated in the Vision, it is essential that the Saudi woman increases her area of expertise in different areas to work areas where she had no previous presence. Therefore, there is a need to expand the educational opportunities offered to the Saudi women to go beyond the existing academic majors in Saudi. The presence of Saudi women studying abroad is growing, and their academic and practical expertise is diverse because of the various educational opportunities they are offered. It is an additional benefit that the women gain international exposure and learn new skills that are practiced in different societies. Saudi Female Doctoral Students (SFGS) represent 14.83% of the overall Saudi Doctoral students studying abroad. For Doctoral Ph.D. level programs in the US: in 2006/7, there were 95 females to 345 male Ph.D. students, in 2010/11 there were 573 females to 1083 males in a Ph.D. level program and 2013: 1276 females to 2092 males were Ph.D. students (Institute of International Education, 2013). Saudi female students were accepted in large numbers to the Saudi university programs and represent approximately 50% of the total Saudi higher education students. This statistic proves

that Saudi females had the academic ability to pursue higher education degrees and the numbers of Saudi females abroad could and should show similar high numbers.

Saudi female doctoral students have an important role in the growth and development of the Saudi nation. As mentioned previously, the Saudi 2030 Vision plans to move from an oil-based economy to an economy that relies on human development as a resource. Governmental sponsorship opportunities like the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) exist to respond to the economic, academic, and professional needs of the country. Saudi Female Doctoral Students (SFGS) could take advantage of these scholarships to study abroad and increase their abilities to enter Saudi Arabia's various sectors. It is important to understand the multiple challenges and opportunities associated with the development and growth of the Saudi woman. The following section presented a short summary of the history behind the presence of formal female education in Saudi Arabia.

The history of establishing a formal educational environment for the Saudi female was full of challenges and stories of determination. Queen Effat Althunayan, the wife of King Faisal Alsaud, was one of the main characters that helped achieve the goal of accessible education for females. There were many cultural and societal obstacles, but with slow and culturally sensitive developmental steps they were resolved and were successful in their mission to establish public schools for the Saudi females (Kéchichian, 2015). According to Hofstede's Model of National Culture (Hofstede, 2014 and Alamri, Cristea & Al-Zaidi, 2014), the Saudi culture responds to cultural changes and new ideas that do not correspond to the cultural norms with refusal and a defensive reaction. Hofstede categorized this behavior under the uncertainty avoidance index (UAI). Societies that score high on this dimension were uncomfortable with changes related to their values and beliefs. Evidence for this dimension was clear in parts of the Saudi history



related to establishing formal education. Saudi was the last of the Arab Gulf countries to establish a formal educational setting for females. The society was not familiar with images of women leaving their houses. With the support of influential royal family male members, efforts from educated, determined royal family female members found success. To convince the society, the women matched their efforts with religious values. Their convincing point was creating an awareness that good Muslim women raised educated Muslim children. Primary school for females was mandatory in 1970. Then in 1967, the first university campus for women was built as part of the already established King Abdul-Aziz University campus for men. Saudi men's formal education had an earlier start in Saudi Arabia. The first university for men, King Saud University, was established in 1957. It was important to recognize that although several men supported women's educational growth in Saudi throughout history, Saudi women themselves also advocated for their progress and development (Kéchichian, 2015).

In addition to the observed growth on the importance of educating the Saudi youth, it was the lack of reported adjustment experience was the main reason. of Saudi women to the challenges they face as they leave Saudi and enter a new culture. A brief overview of the issues is discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

The Saudi history described many challenges that Saudi females faced were related to two of the dimensions Hofstede used to describe the Saudi community (Hofstede, 2014 and Alamri, Cristea & Al-Zaidi, 2014). One of them was the Avoiding Uncertainty index was Hofstede's sixth cultural dimension which was related to society's fear of incorporating different ideas and practices. Saudi women had long experienced conditions of limited social, political, and economic participation. The fear of changes to long-lived societal and cultural habits and

traditions create obstacles for women who aspire to hold effective and influential roles in society (Quamar, 2013, p. 275).

The collectivist nature of the Saudi society created many challenges for SFGS. Collectivist cultures score low on Hofstede's Individualism dimension. Relationships between members in Collectivist cultures are based on an exchange of loyalty to the social norms and the role of responsibility towards one another. A member of the society that decides to serve their benefit through breaking from the societal norms is cold-shouldered and exposed to the penalty of shaming as a response from the society. The presence of restrictive norms is associated with Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance dimension where members of the Saudi society stay away from nuances that do not agree with the culture's beliefs and values. Saudi is a patriarchal society with prescribed gender roles and men are expected to lead and take care of their families. The patriarchal nature agrees with the Islamic provisions on guardianship. The Mahram is a male family member who is either the husband or a male blood relative. The Mehram assumes the role of guardianship, provider, protector and main decision maker in a family (Shehada, 2009). Saudi is one of the few Islamic countries that implement the Islamic provision on Mahrams within some of its laws (Engineer, 2008). One of the provisions requires women to travel with Mahram permission. The Saudi law permits women to travel within the country without her Mahram's permission, but the law varies for traveling abroad (Arab News, 2014). The King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) policies state the requirement of the continued presence of the Maharam for females that intend to join the program to travel and study abroad (Bukhari and Denman, 2013, p.154). The media and online social platforms report the challenges of Saudi females eligible to receive the sponsorship opportunity but are unable to find a Mahram to accompany them (Mbt3th, 2011 and Alattawi, 2012). Students applying for KASP but had no

Mahram to accompany them results in the student losing the opportunity to gain the scholarship (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013, p. 154).

An interesting challenge Saudi women faced while studying in the United States was the availability of a wide variety of different subjects in which they could major. The availability of a large number of majors not relevant to the female labor market in the Saudi society could result in students choosing career paths which were not compatible with the traditional view of the Saudi society or matching the available career positions for females. This was more evident for females that had limited access to formal academic Saudi guidance. Women practitioners of new fields to the Saudi society, face problematic issues when their career paths (as a result of studying new subjects) do not comply with the cultural expectations of the collectivist society. "It was especially difficult for women in collectivist societies to rise above social and cultural expectations to assert their individual identities" (Kim, 2009, p. 569). There were several examples of the collectivist society that challenge the issue of women studying abroad. In a social media forum for the citizens of a neighboring Arab Gulf country (with similar collectivist ideologies), men and women discussed the importance of women's role in creating families. More than once and by both genders, it was mentioned that careers were not crucial for females and only in instances where the female was highly intelligent, was it then acceptable for her to travel to study abroad (Qatarshares, 2008). A UN study that focused on females in Iraq showed similar opinions on the expected role of women in collectivist societies. Reported views on the culturally expected female role varied between a 37% response of raising children, 61% responded women were expected to build families, and only a 1% response indicated the expectation of women adopting decision making roles within their family. (UNFPA, 2011, p. 27). It was essential to be cautious when making decisions that might affect the future place of

the female in the Saudi society. Female members of the Saudi collectivistic society place a high value on solidarity, conformity, and family cohesion to avoid shame resulting from breaking norms. Females of a collectivist society follow the expectations of the group to avoid the negative consequences of detachment and loss of face (Latham, 2007, p. 2).

Another difficulty faced by SFGS was the nature of the educational systems and their policies. For example, the process to obtain the government scholarship funding was difficult and considered to be full of roadblocks for some ambitious applicants. Like most countries around the world, educational growth opportunities were dependent on aptitude test grades, interviews, recommendations and grades from past programs, but some program requirements were challenging to meet. For example, the King Abdullah Scholarship requires certain age limits for each degree. Thousands of students apply for the scholarship, but only a few hundred are accepted and by the time scholarship applications are reopened, a student may already have crossed the age limit. The educational systems presented another challenge related to the student's shock when facing different learning system in the US. Unlike the different learning systems in the U.S. schools that focused in the past years on student-centered learning, the Saudi educational system caters to the traditional teacher-centered setting (Hamdan, 2005). Although the Saudi system was currently working on developing and modernizing its learning system, teacher-centered classrooms and rote memorization study methods still exist in many schools. Saudi students find themselves not prepared for the U.S. university educational setting that values independent creative, critical thinking and reasoning skills.

In closing, it was clear that graduated SFGS were acknowledged important resource for the future of the Saudi nation, but it was also evident that they faced many obstacles. Nevertheless, few studies focused on the acculturation process and adjustment experience during

their academic journey (Hamdan, 2005, Alharthi, 2005). Thus, our understanding of the acculturation process of SFGS merits research and could be especially enriched by studies undertaken by Saudi women who had a greater understanding of the barriers Saudi female doctoral students face. What set an Arab Gulf scholar from other researchers was their understanding of the culture and the relationships between the phenomena and the reasons behind them. Indeed, there was always a need for more culturally sensitive researchers to produce research (Alharthi, 2005; Hamdan, 2005; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Almurshidi, 2014;). They could reduce the observed bias in the existing work on SFGS. Another bias observed, came from male researchers that were from a culturally related society. The literature reported that the studies conducted by Arab Gulf women tend to be more sympathetic in explaining the challenges faced by females in education (Alharthi, 2005; Hamdan, 2005). There is a need for this study to be added to the limited literature. The study on the acculturation process of SFGS was critical for many reasons:

- To help Saudi females recognize the prospect of their abilities, bring awareness to diverse meanings of adjustment and remove the stigma associated with breaking norms.
- Scholarship entities and university offices that serve study abroad students in both the U.S. and Saudi could use the knowledge of the reported factors associated with acculturation as a guide to aid Saudi female doctoral students (or students with related cultural background) in their acculturation/adjustment stages.
- This study may point to the processes that were helpful to the SFGS and encourage them to continue their studies.

## **Research Questions**

The main research questions that the study answered were as follows:

1. What were the biggest barriers and support factors associated with successful acculturation of Saudi Women? How did the barriers or supportive factors differ for Saudi women from different parts of Saudi (if all)?
2. What strategies were most successful in helping Saudi women adjust to studying in the United States?
3. What institutional characteristics (external) or individual characteristics (internal) were related to helping Saudi Women adjust?

The remaining chapters of this dissertation include a literature review presented in Chapter 2 is followed by Chapter 3 with a description of the proposed methodology that was used to carry out this research work. In Chapter 4, the participants of the study were described. Next, Chapter 5 presented the study results. Finally, Chapter 6 included the conclusions, implications, and recommendations that flow from this research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, a detailed literature review of the existing studies on the acculturation of international students was presented. In particular, studies related to the acculturation of Saudi Female Doctoral Students (SFGS) in the U.S. were the primary focus. The literature review was carried out in three phases. First, conceptual models were reviewed. This includes a study of Hofstede's cultural dimensions which identifies six different dimensions characterizing different cultures. This model used to study and understand the cultures of the U.S. and Saudi and the differences between the cultures of both these countries. Through self-reporting, each participant provided her point of view which helped understand the measure of the depth of Hofstede's characteristic of the home (regional) culture of each SFGS. To understand the process of adjustment of Saudi Female Doctoral Students (SFGS) in the US, the different modes of adjustment that students adopt, when they move to other countries, were studied. In this context, Berry's Acculturation Model was also presented. Then, research on how the background characteristics and experiences of the student could influence the acculturation mode was studied. This includes a review of the existing studies related to the adjustment of international students as well as a study of the characteristics of SFGS which were important in the context of her acculturation. It should be noted that there was a shortage of research on this topic and as a result, it was necessary to draw upon studies that in some cases were undertaken more than two decades ago. Finally, the role of institutions including curriculum, faculty, staff, and domestic students could play a role in the acculturation of international students in reviewed. This includes a study of the characteristics of the U.S. universities which were helpful during the adjustment

process of international students in the US. Finally, conclusions were presented at the end of this chapter.

### **Hofstede's National Cultural Model**

Hofstede's National Cultural Model explains how the values of the individuals living in society, were influenced by that society's culture. Moreover, it uses a structure derived from factor analysis, to relate these values and the behavior of the individuals. According to this theory, differences between cultures are identified according to the measurements of preferred behavior within six categories.

The first dimension was the Power Distance Index (PDI). This dimension focuses on the acceptance of inequality between individuals of the society. It measures the extent to which the less powerful members accept and expect an unequal distribution of power. The second dimension, Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV) looks at the degrees of integration of the individuals. The "We" (collectivist) society is characterized by loyalty and care versus the "Me" (individual) society where individuals took care of themselves. Another dimension, Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS), characterizes whether a society was masculine (where focusing on competition and achievement was the sign of success) or feminine (where the quality of life was a sign of success). The Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), was another dimension, which explains how a society deals with ambiguity. A high score on this index indicated that the people of the society follow a strict code while a low score indicates that the people of the society were more willing to tolerate and accept different ideas. Long-term vs. Short-term orientation (LTO) was a dimension which explains whether a society was long-term oriented or short-term. Short-term oriented societies honor norms and traditions while long-term oriented societies adopt a



pragmatic approach while solving problems. Lastly, Indulgence vs. Restraint (IND) dimension characterizes individuals' control of desire relating to how they were raised and socialized.

**Hofstede's cultural dimensions for Saudi and other Arab countries.** Hofstede's cultural dimensions, as they apply to Saudi Arabia, were discussed in this sub-section. Since, it was easy to mistake Saudi culture with the overall Arab culture; hence, in this section, the important differences between the Saudi culture and the culture of other popular Arab countries were also highlighted.

The Saudi society scored a high-power index evident because of its tribal nature. Moreover, it was found to be a masculine society where people live to work, and there was difficulty in resolving conflicts. Saudi scored low on pragmatism which meant its members follow a short-termed orientation. Their orientation indicated a strong concern for establishing truth (which was dictated by religion and some traditions) and focus on achieving quick results with little focus towards the future. They also honor traditions and were suspicious of any change (Hofstede, 2014).

Different Arab cultures in the Middle East share similar scores to those of Saudi Arabia, on many cultural dimensions. However, there were also some critical differences. For example, unlike Saudi Arabia, Kuwait was a feminine society where people value equality, solidarity, and equality. They tend to resolve conflicts through negotiations and focus on wellbeing (Hofstede, 2014). Similarly, unlike Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was neither masculine nor feminine (Hofstede, 2014). These differences indicated the inaccuracy in the generalization of the Arab cultural aspects.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions explain the existence of challenging and supportive factors to empower women. The challenges women had in relation to development and

communicating with men were clarified using Hofstede's cultural dimensions. High power, short-term orientation, uncertainty avoidance were some characteristics that explain the existing challenges. The common feature between all the Arab Gulf cultures share was that of collectivism, where, not following the rules of the culture could result in shame and guilt. Segregation exists in all the Arab Gulf cultures; its presence relates to religious practices and traditions (this explains the relaxed policies between the Arab Gulf societies). Females monitor the social boundaries more than men to avoid shame (Alharthi, 2005, p. 5).

In a collectivist society, decisions for students were dependent on family member's experiences and opinions. Choosing majors were dependent on their family's preferences and not on the student's interests. This could affect the acculturation process because students had no interest to learn the knowledge. The student may Separate (no interest in new or home community) because of disinterest of the new community and frustration with his own. separation is reported to affect the quality of learning because the student did not gain the learning benefit from the student engagement activities (Singaravelu et al., 2005, p. 53).

Due to the restrictive societal norms, there was a strong assumption that the female doctoral students arrived with the following orientations described using Hofstede's dimensions:

- Power Distance Index (PDI). Their high score on PDI indicate the absence of the behavior to question authority.
- Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV). They display a collectivist nature with strong community bonds and adherence to cultural norms.
- Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS): Their behaviors associated with a masculine society where members prioritize work and achievements.

- Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI). They score high score on UAI due to the limited acceptance of new ideas that contradict the cultural norms.
- Long-term vs. Short-term orientation (LTO). They lean toward short-term orientation where Saudis honor norms and traditions.
- Indulgence vs. Restraint (IND). They show a balance of a restraining and indulging nature.

Understanding the reasons (defined characteristics) behind the existence of different factors provides an understanding of what effects the student during her acculturation process. The factors and the reasons behind them could help give more knowledge on the choices the students make about their acculturation mode.

In the next section, Berry's Acculturation Model was presented. While Hofstede's cultural dimensions could be studied to understand the different dimensions of the Saudi and U.S. cultures, further research linking Berry's Acculturation Model to student adjustment is important to understand the links between different cultural dimensions of Saudi Arabia/U.S., and adjustment of the SFGS in the U.S.

### **Berry's Acculturation Model**

Berry's research initially focused on migrants. According to Berry, people migrate for different reasons. Some people are "pushed" to move to the host country because of natural disasters (e.g., famine, earthquake, drought, etc.), security reasons, lack of job opportunities, etc. Other people are "pulled" to a host country because they seek better job opportunities, better security, pleasant weather conditions, etc. However, since the participants of the study were in the U.S. to develop their education and were sponsored by the Saudi government or a Saudi university, there was no need to investigate their push and pull factors.

There were many similarities between migrants and international students (non-immigrant/temporary migrants) that make Berry's model applicable to the international student population. According to Berry, all migrants go through an acculturation process. However, for international students, the acculturation method chosen during their time in the host community was adopted temporarily because the students return to their country after graduation (Berry, 1997, p. 8). After their return to their home countries, the international students go through another acculturation process and are forced to change their temporarily adopted lifestyle. This process was called the reverse culture shock where they must make a choice deciding whether to keep the same values that they adopted in their host country while they were temporary residents there or to embrace the values of their home society.

Berry's Model of Acculturation is based on two central issues: cultural values and contact with the new society (Berry, 1987, p. 494). It defines four modes of acculturation (Berry, 1997, p. 10). These are Assimilation, Separation, Marginalization, and Integration. Assimilation is a mode defined by an individual's choice to avoid maintaining the home culture values and seeks daily interaction with the new and dominant community. The Separation mode is identified when individuals placed value on the home culture only, and the new and dominant culture was avoided. Similarly, Marginalization is a mode identified when an individual chose to avoid maintaining the home cultural values and avoid interacting with the new culture. Lastly, Integration is a mode defined by an individual choice to create a balance between keeping his/her own identity and also maintaining a relationship built on interaction with the new community. Berry stated strategies that allow positive experiences during the adjustment process like having prior foreign cultural experience (1987, p. 495). Along with Hofstede's model, Berry's model helped provide perspective and interpretation of the results.

**International student adjustment with respect to ethnicity.** Ethnicity in the adjustment of the international student received insufficient attention in the literature (Kwon, 2009; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, & Philip, 2006). Kwon also studied students in the Midwest. It was in the states of the Midwest region where most international students were found. Nine states had at least more than 10,000 students and Ohio, Michigan and Illinois had more than 30,000 (Inte2015). In their study on student adjustment, Kwon (2009) and Poyrazli et al. (2006) call for a more coordinated strategy to help international students in their academic journey.

Kwon pointed out the importance of promoting assimilation by stating that universities that created sources that quickly helped the student adjust. Also emphasized was the importance of understanding the student's cultural background to "facilitate the development of multicultural environments that will be supportive of their academic goals" (Kwon, 2009, p. 3). Multicultural environments in this study mean the balance between the U.S. culture and the home culture (Berardo & Deardorff., 2012). However, as indicated by Berry, assimilation as an acculturation method may be the method used to design most international student support programs but was not the only method of adjustment (Berry, 1987). Hence, in the context of the adjustment of international students in their host society, other acculturation modes also need to be developed. Existing studies focus on quantitative research-based perspectives in providing data related to adjustment differences between individual international students. Kwon, for example, looked at how the variables of ethnicity, gender, degree status and language proficiency affected the student's adjustment (Kwon, 2009). Being culturally sensitive entails carefully adding and not replacing the traditions students were accustomed to – carefully clarifying the sources "from the western rhetorical traditions" (Hamdan, 2005, p.71). However, it was still a challenging situation that requires sufficient background knowledge (Hamdan, 2005, p. 71).

**Acculturation factors.** Mori (2000) states that as international students adjust to their new educational and social environment, they experience unique stressors that were different from what the U.S. students experience (as cited in Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). Studies show that their stressors were heightened because international students lack access to resources to support them (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008, p. 828). Acculturative stressors were the factors that influence the acculturation process. In most studies where the word stressor was used, the results indicate negative issues associated with poor acculturation strategies. Berry (1987) indicated that not all stressors were negative and some had positive effects (p. 507). The study focuses on challenging and supporting issues associated with the acculturation process. Because of this, in this study stressors were referred to as factors.

### **Important Characteristics of Saudi Female Doctoral Students in The Context of Acculturation**

In this section, characteristics of SFGS that influenced their adjustment in the US, were discussed. The characteristics included: Hijab, race and ethnicity, the accompanying of a Mahram, and the level of spoken English, etc. These factors were highlighted in the literature focusing on the challenges which Muslim and Arab women face in the US. These characteristics were discussed in detail in this section. Some of the characteristics that were reported in the literature were associated with Muslim female international student experiences. Since Muslim female international students also include Saudi female doctoral students, these characteristics were also relevant in the case of Saudi female doctoral students.

**The Hijab.** The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) issued a document on discrimination against Muslim women (ACLU, 2008). It states that women wearing a Hijab or headscarf were targets for discrimination. The report addresses serious issues related to

harassment like getting fired from jobs or getting banned from certain places (ACLU, 2008). In relation to the Hijab, Muslim females stated that their teachers, class peers (specifically Arab males) perceived their headscarf as a symbol of conservativeness and did not engage with them. Some male students were careful not to even talk to them. The ACLU report (2008) presents documented incidents outside of class where the Hijab -covered females were either ignored or stared at by the people surrounding them; this usually happened in public places like gas stations in rural areas. The ACLU study reported that covered women reported more harassment incidents (69%) than the Muslim females that do not wear the headscarf (29%) (2008, p. 1).

In regards to culture, communication between men and women was related to the conservative cultural attitudes in Saudi. Though strictness of this approach varies by region, the overall attitude of avoiding any communication with men was encouraged. Feelings of guilt and shame affect adjusting to a mix gendered environment (Alharthi, 2005, p. 5). In summary, many Saudi female students chose to observe their Hijab to follow their cultural norm of limiting communication with strange men. This choice influences their adjustment in the U.S. due to the cultural differences surrounding communication between genders.

**Nationality and religion.** Some international students indicated facing racial and ethnic discrimination for the first time when they enter the American culture (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007 p. 340). The literature reported on students from Islamic countries in the Arab Gulf region who felt discrimination in their class based on political issues. In one example, in a course related to politics, one class discussed terrorism. A female student in that class was shocked and was uncomfortable with one of the readings assigned that mentioned her home country (in this case it was Saudi Arabia). She felt uncomfortable with the discussion and did not participate or engage in class. Similar situations happened to Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. after September

11, 2001. Large numbers of Middle Eastern students of Arab ethnicity left the U.S. due to discrimination and harassment. The Institute for International Education reported that Saudi student enrolment dropped 16% in 2004 (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 382).

**The Mahram (male guardian).** This factor was associated only with female students from Saudi Arabia. Most Saudi scholarship programs obligate the student to be accompanied by a male guardian. This unique factor was discussed further in the methods section indicating that markers of cultural boundaries were important in acculturation process. The Saudi student cultural differences showed that the presence of a Mahram proved a challenge to the female Saudi students. Through compliance with the conservative and religious culture of Saudi Arabia, governmental policies mandate that male guardians must accompany females when they travel. The presence of a Mehram is part of the governmental scholarship policies. The Saudi Ministry of Higher Education states that adherence to the policy ensures the safety of students (Bukhari & Denman, 2013 p. 154). This may be true especially in the absence of social support resources. However, the unavailability of a Mahram, due to work or old age, were a problem for female students. In one of the social websites that discussed a female student's difficulty, her father was deceased, and she had a brother employed in the private sector. Employees of the public-sector employees were granted leave to accompany female students; this was not a benefit granted to employees of the private sector (Alosaimi, 2008). One student used the online social platform to look for advice. She came to the host country accompanied by her brother who traveled back home after a month. She lived in fear that she might be discovered by the scholarship officials (Mbt3th, 2012).

In a conservative patriarchal society, the community views women as an individual that cannot survive independently and must be protected and dependent on a family related male



figure (Hamdan, 2005, p. 44). Hence, the ability to meet the formal policy requirement of a Mahram's continued presence played an essential role in the adjustment of SFGS in the US. The obligation for some SFGS to be accompanied by a Mahram was an obstacle in their adjustment process. It should be noted that although KASP policy requires the presence of the Mahram, there were no clear indication in the literature that the same policy applies to females sponsored by their university. It is also important to note that the current media reported discussion in the ministry related to facilitating dropping the Mahram requirement for the female sponsored student (Alghamdi, 2017), but for all the women the researcher interviewed, this was a requirement for some and thus affected their acculturation process in the US.

**Level of understanding of English language and the U.S. culture.** In the study by Almurshidi on Arab Gulf student adjustment, Arab Gulf students report misunderstanding related to cultural context. They cannot understand jokes, idioms or metaphors and this could sometimes affect clear communication and even test scores (Almurshidi, 2014, p. 106). This was also the same for Chinese students; it was linked to a factor called language anxiety because they cannot understand their teachers and friends (Yu & Wang, 2011, p. 199).

Difficulty in mastering the English language skills was a source of distress for many international students. Because this could affect their academic performance, many students opt to choose majors or a career that required fewer language skills (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007 p. 339). Hence, SFGS who had a better understanding of the U.S. culture and the English language might find it easier to adjust to the U.S.

**Level of family support.** Previous research reveals that most international students who had family support found the factor of family support to help them adjust into their new environment (Zhai, 2002; Schneider & Spinler, 1986; Surdam & Collins, 1984). The support of

parents and family members help students ignore negative comments that might come from the community back home. Negative comments may include criticism in changing a practice or a habit that was followed in the home environment but stopped during the student's time to the host community. Hence, to adjust to the host society, the level of family support that an SFGS enjoys also plays an important role.

**Prior intercultural experience.** Research suggests that students with experience with individuals from different cultures had smooth adjustment experiences. Almurshidi points out that those international students who adjusted faster to the U.S. community than their peers come from more diverse communities (Almurshidi, 2014, p. 106). A student's preparedness could be affected positively by prior intercultural experience (Berry, 1987, p. 495). For example, students that come from the metropolitan city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), show to adjust faster than students who come from rural parts of the Arab Gulf (Almurshidi, 2014, p. 106). The makeup of the United Arab Emirates society helped with adjustment. The UAE has a diverse population where the native Emirati's comprise only 11% of the total population. Other nationalities present in the United Arab Emirates include other Arabs, South and East Asians, and Westerners (Index Mundi, 2015).

Within Saudi Arabia, there were many metropolitan cities with a large number of expatriates from Western countries. These include cities like Jeddah, Dammam, Makkah, and Riyadh, etc. On the other hand, some regions had very few to no expatriate presence. Based on research in the UAE, it was likely that SFGS coming from major cities like Jeddah, Dammam, Makkah, and Riyadh had prior intercultural experience that helped them with their acculturation process than other students that came from rural parts of Saudi.

## **Important Characteristics of U.S. Universities in The Context of Acculturation**

In this section, the attributes of the U.S. universities, which influence the acculturation of international students, were discussed.

**Student Orientation.** For international students, moving to the U.S., and studying in a university was often a major change in their lives. Hence, as soon as they arrive in the US, they need immediate help (Dalili, 1982). To make a smooth adjustment to their new environment and to divert potential problem, universities offer cultural and academic orientation programs to international students. Providing an informative orientation was an effective approach. However, these programs were even more effective when they also discuss academic demands in U.S. classrooms since academic achievement was a top priority for international students (Zhai, 2002).

Apart from the content of the orientation programs, their timing and duration were also important. According to Pedersen (1991), orientation was a continuous process requiring contact with students before they arrive and during their stay. Hence, effective orientation programs were those that were provided to students throughout their studies. Moreover, providing information about the United States culture and its educational system to prospective students was helpful, and better prepares them for the new culture and the educational environment in the U.S. (Dalili, 1982).

**International student support services.** International students often find the following three student services most useful when they were in need of help: an office of international education, counseling, and international student societies (Zhai, 2002).

University departments that focus on international student services could play an important role in facilitating international students. According to one study (Zhai, 2002),

university support services directed to international students were the most frequently used student support services, used by around 90% of the international students. The support services were helpful when dealing with issues related to visas, immigration, traveling, administrative, and legal issues. On the other hand, some international students often find the staff too busy with the legal issues to help with emotional or psychological problems.

Johnson (1993) and Dalili (1982) found student counseling as one of the most important services for international students. However, international students often do not feel easy about openly sharing their feelings of loneliness with strangers or with professional counselors (Sandhu et al., 1991). Cultural characteristics related to shame and honor were some reasons why opening up to a stranger difficult. Intercultural training for the counselors could help the service to be more effective and used. Similarly, many international students were often not aware of all the support services available to them at their universities. Hence, university counseling services which take the initiative to reach out to international students to find if they need any help were often more effective (Zhai, 2002). Pedersen (1991) found that to allow international students to express their feelings more freely, counseling often takes place in informal settings such as hallways, homes, or street corners. Moreover, informal methods of counseling were often more effective. These include presentations, discussions, or daily encounters which were not perceived as counseling by the international students (Sandhu et al., 1991). It was found that international student advisers were often the most trusted university staff for international students. Hence, counseling and advising services provided by international student services were most useful in helping international students dealing both with culture shock and with adjustment in the U.S. education system (Zhai, 2002).

**International student societies.** Universities encourage international students from the same country to create a student society specific to their country to help them adjust. These organizations were useful in different ways. For example, while international students find international student support services helpful in resolving their immigration and legal issues, for psychological and emotional problems, friends and family were the most preferred resources to seek help (Zhai, 2002; Schneider & Spinler, 1986; Surdam & Collins, 1984). While often no family members were with SFGS, friends could include either fellow international students from their home countries or other international students (Zhai, 2002). Though the research on this topic was scant, it suggests that fellow international students from their home countries were beneficial as they often speak the same language, share the same culture, and had similar adjustment issues. Therefore, they were found to be the best source for help in such matters. An international student society provides a platform for international students to meet, interact, and socialize with other international students from their home country.

**English language tutoring programs and workshops.** International students were reported to experience challenges associated with communication in an academic setting (Zhai, 2002). English as a Second Language (ESL) programs were often introduced by universities for the benefit of international students. These programs include training in both written and spoken English and were offered to all international students whose first language was not English. Zhai (2002) stated that the programs were more effective when they also include cultural and academic orientation information.

Sandhu et al. (1991) suggest that it was helpful to international students if the university organizes short communication workshops addressing verbal communication as a part of orientation programs. Similar seminars allow international students to become familiar with the

use of informal/traditional English (which they were more likely to encounter in the streets) and commonly used slang words to be able to communicate effectively both in the academic and non-academic settings (Sandhu et al., 1991).

**Curriculum with international perspective and culturally aware faculty.** Literature showed that a curriculum with an international perspective and supportive faculty is proved to be beneficial for the international student adjustment. International students found that a global perspective in teaching and learning helped their adjustment (Zhai, 2002). Helston & Prescott (2004) recommend the assurance of quality teaching and the provision of culturally agreeable learning opportunities for international students with the help of critical evaluation of existing academic discourses and practices. Hence, adding an international perspective to curriculum was helpful in making international students adjust.

In addition to the curriculum, faculty engagement was reported to affect the acculturation of SFGS. Hofstede emphasized the role of the teacher in improving the academic adaptation experience for international students (1986, p.316). Student engagement scholars like Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Astin (1991) and Kuh (2005) emphasized the importance of student-teacher interaction and its powerful impact on learning (Trowler, 2010, p.34). Understanding the students' home educational system could help staff create systems or methods to help them adjust to the American educational system. For example, in one case, realizing that the students' home educational system focused more on memorization than on critical thinking, modified the expectations of the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers (Hershberger and Farber, 2008, p. 5). They looked for solutions to create methods that could help these students acquire the cognitive skills needed for learning. Higher education staffs recognize the need for a shared community and peer support. Fanta Aw described the importance of understanding an

international students culture for the international student sense of comfort that leads to a better adjustment and transition to the host society (Aw, 2012). Hence, universities that offer intercultural training to their faculty who were expected to work with international students, provided them with skills that help students to experience a smooth adjustment experience in contrast to faculty without the related training. Another way that faculty could assist with adjusting was to have one-on-one meetings with the international students. For many international students (especially those who come from masculine societies), the goal was to Doctoral and achieve excellence as it brings honor to the family while failure brings dishonor (Singaravelu et al., 2005, p.48). Therefore, academic achievement was a top priority for international students (Zhai, 2002). For some reasons, sometimes, international students require help with their studies even after their formal class times. For example, an international student can face stress due to her weak English language skill, might not understand everything said in the class and not ask any questions. For this reason, in a study carried out by Zhai (2002), he recommended the availability of one-to-one meetings with faculty members.

**Interaction with U.S. students.** International students often felt isolated from the U.S. society (Zhai, 2002). Interaction with U.S. students not only allows international students to improve their language skills but also helps them to understand and adjust to the U.S. culture. International students who spent more of their spare time with U.S. students had fewer adjustment challenges than those who spent their spare time with members of their home society (Surdam & Collins, 1984). Similarly, interaction with culturally and linguistically different students teach U.S. students cross-cultural skills which were important in today's diverse society. Hence, many universities design programs which allow interaction between the U.S. and

international students such as English conversation partner program, culture clubs, and international festivals.

## **Conclusion**

Studying the factors related to the acculturation of SFGS in the U.S. was important. The number of such students was increasing, and adjustment problems were arising. These issues could be related to academics, social or personal aspects. Staff and teachers of higher education institutions who interact with these students could provide valuable feedback and suggestions. However, without taking into account the cultural background of the student and the self-reported factors that affect their acculturation, the solutions suggested cannot be effective.

Hofstede's National Cultural Model and Berry's Acculturation Model were used to create a better understanding of the difficulties that SFGS face when they enter the US. The implications and further research were based on the need to create a better educational experience for these students. For example, knowing that monolingual teaching styles may cause language difficulties that lead to possibly adopting the separation acculturation mode, which, in turn, leads to dropping out of the university, might encourage language teachers in the Saudi to reassess their teaching styles. Research about specific cultures helps create an understanding that was vital for positive communication in today's diverse world.

According to the literature, there was an observed need for research to assist students with overcoming obstacles that result from factors that negatively influence a student's acculturation process. The literature reported the "Mahram" factor as a source of complications and therefore there is a need to study and present solutions on how to help students without Mahrams adjust while maintaining cultural identity. According to the literature, there is a need to assist the female students with knowledge on how to locate support resources. Following the



review of the relevant literature in this chapter, the next chapter presented the methodology of the proposed research. It discussed the choice of research methods and design among the available alternatives as well as the procedures adopted for the selection of participants and the collection and analysis of data.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of Saudi Female Doctoral Students (SFGS) concerning their adjustment experiences studying at an urban research university in the US. In this chapter, the methodology used to conduct the research was presented. The method was introduced in the first section and was followed by a discussion on the design of the study. Next, the criteria used to select participants for this study were presented. This was followed by a focus on the importance of confidentiality and how it was ensured. In the following section, the data collection procedures were introduced. Finally, the methods and tools used to analyze the data were discussed at the end of this chapter.

The framework of the study was guided by Hofstede's National Cultural Model (Hofstede, 2003) and Berry's Acculturation Model (1987). Both were used to achieve a level of understanding of the students' acculturation process. Hofstede's cultural dimensions determines the characteristics of the students' home cultures. Understanding the cultural background of the students helped U.S. understand the presence of the factors affecting their acculturation. Through the understanding of the factors in relation to the cultural background, Berry's model helps place the students in their acculturation process. Factors that affect the acculturation process are either a barrier or support to the student's adjustment experience. This information could help practitioners in higher education in assisting students and in providing support for their specific needs. Moreover, this information could also help researchers to understand and identify the factors that affect the acculturation process of SFGS in the US. The models work together to give more clarity to practitioners on the issues the different ethnic groups face.

Briggs & Harvard (1983) and Foust et al. (1981) focus on international student's culture shock. Culture shock describes the feelings discomfort when familiar cultural values are replaced by new values from a new culture (Fatima, 2001). In the context of acculturation, Lee et al. (2009) found that international female students reported having more problems than their male counterparts. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) found that female international Doctoral students encountered more problems socially, psychologically, and educationally than international male Doctoral students. Previous research also revealed that the reason behind some of the challenges female doctoral students face was the limited support they receive from their academic departments and family environments (Fatima, 2001). But there was a dearth of research on issues related specifically to Saudi female problems.

The study focused on the acculturation experiences of Saudi women in Doctoral programs within a Midwestern U.S. university.

### **Research Method and Design**

This section presented a discussion on the design decisions taken during this research. For example, the different design decisions include quantitative versus qualitative approach, post-positivist, constructivist, or criticalist paradigm, ethnographic versus phenomenological design, etc.

**Research approach.** Regarding broad research approach, there are two approaches: quantitative and qualitative. In this study, the qualitative approach was used to provide deeper insights for acculturation study of international students. The qualitative approach requires detailed observations and explanations. It combines methods, analyses, and interpretations to seek multiple perspectives on human experience. It involves studying the whole situation to understand the complexity and make sure that the conclusions drawn were based on both general

and unique factors. In the context of this study, the perspective of different Saudi female students was sought with respect to their experience of adjustment in the US. This required a thorough investigation which took into account the experiences of various Saudi female students coming from different backgrounds and having different experiences in the US. Each student was treated as a case study, and open-ended questions were used in the interview process.

**Research paradigm.** There was a range of epistemological approaches to qualitative research such as postpositivist, constructivism, and criticalist; this study employs a criticalist approach. Criticalists believe that the social world was governed by multiple truths, which were contextually situated (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). This was also true in the context of this study where different Saudi female students may define success differently based on their socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, criticalists study traditional ideas about knowledge and reality and find them wanting (Carspecken, 1996). Schwandt (2007) asserts that critical theory looks at the "taken for granted characteristics of the social world, encouraging reassessment" and it "works from within existing thought to reveal both shortcoming and possibilities in whatever was under study" (p. 55). Research topics for criticalists were driven by their value orientation (Carspecken, 1996, p. 8). In the context of this study, the value orientation of the researcher was to help Saudi females become aware of how to employ their abilities towards their interpretation of success. In comparison to the post-positivist and the constructivist approaches, the criticalist method appeared to be a more appropriate approach for this study. Hence, the criticalist approach was used in this study.

**Research Design.** With respect to the design of this research, the two most relevant alternatives were ethnographic and phenomenological designs. In Marshal and Rossman's book on qualitative research design (2014), the goal of a phenomenological design was to provide a

deep understanding of the nature of a specific phenomenon using observations and lengthy, intensive interviews. On the other hand, Marshal and Rossman (2014), note that research using ethnographic design describes and interprets cultural or social norms. This study focuses on understanding the adjustment process of the SFGS in the US; this required an understanding of the cultural patterns of SFGS. The research focused on providing an understanding of how individuals were situated within the cultural patterns found in their society. Hence, an ethnographic study was deemed a more appropriate choice and was used in this research. Carspecken (Carspecken, 1996) defines five stages of a critical ethnographic qualitative research. These were awareness of biases, a collection of data, observation of patterns, interviews, and group discussions. In group discussions, there was a risk of not fully disclosing information because of possible shaming that might happen as a response to breaking away from following the culture's restricting social norms.

In summary, the researcher used a qualitative research design using a criticalist paradigm to understand the acculturation of SFGS in the US. The use of qualitative methods was based on the ethnographic nature of the study. Descriptive Reconstructive Analysis was used to help create themes and code the data.

### **Selection of Participants**

Since the study focused on the adjustment of SFGS in the US, only relevant people were involved in the research. The participants considered include female doctoral students who are from Saudi but were temporarily living in the U.S. with the purpose of carrying out Doctoral studies. While selecting the participants, care was taken to ensure any representation of candidates from different regions of Saudi Arabia. Similarly, both part-time and full-time

students were considered. Moreover, efforts were made to ensure the representation of varying age ranges.

Another essential point considered when selecting the participants were the presence of students that represented the different regions of Saudi Arabia. The regional difference might offer a comparison of adjustment related differences if any existed that were related to the culture of their home regions. Different regions in Saudi vary in the manner in which its people express their cultural beliefs and traditions (Altamimi, 2014). Literature on Saudi sociocultural aspects focused on two regions Najd (Central Region) and Hijaz (Western Region). Each region was described through the repeated use of specific adjectives. Najd or the Central Region was associated with the adjectives conservative and mono-ethnic (Holes, 2011, p.205 and Wynbrandt, 2010, p.117) The region deeply values tribal roots and encourages tribal marriages due to the sacred value of their roots (Zuhur, 2005, p. 203). The Western Region or Hijaz was described in the literature as tolerant, lenient and open (Alselaimi & Lord, 2012 and Holes, 2011, p.205 and Wynbrandt, 2010, p.117). It was also described as culturally diverse because of its religious and economic importance (Aldhuwaihi et al, 2012, p.385).

Hamdan (2005, p. 55), points out that one possible reason for the existence of regional differences was that many people in the Western Region were descendants of religious pilgrims who visited the holy city of Makkah and then decided to stay and live there. Out of the 30 million people in Saudi Arabia, around 30% were foreigners. Aldhuwaihi et al, describe the region as more diverse than any other part of Saudi (2012, p.385). Hamdan adds to the emphasis of the unique nature of Hijaz by describing the character of the Hijazi women as bold and expressive "the most heterogeneous of the other regions and provinces in the country" (Hamdan, 2005, p. 48). These descriptions show the possibility that regional differences could be the factor

that affects SFGS acculturation process. Knowing the regional cultural background of each SFGS might provide interesting insights into their acculturation process in the US.

In total, 13 SFGS from a Midwestern research university in the U.S. were interviewed, and all the interviews were conducted in person by the researcher.

**Confidentiality.** Interviews were a fundamental part of this study. While every effort was made to keep the whole process transparent, the interviews were kept confidential. Hence, a balance was made between both transparency and confidentiality. Confidentiality for both the participants and the institution which they represented was important in the study for several reasons. For example, identifying the challenges that students face at a particular university might influence the decision of potential applicants considering admission in that university. Similarly, the Saudi culture was susceptible towards behaviors that could result in 'shame' and affect the 'honor' of women. Hence, if a particular female participant were identified through the study, she would face repercussions if any of her actions or answers were considered offensive in the Saudi society. It was important during the study that every effort was made to keep the study both transparent and confidential to avoid the identification of both the institutions and the participants. With respect to the interviews, this was done by making sure that none of the responses could be traced back to a particular institution or a specific participant.

### **Data Collection**

All the interviews carried out as part of the study were audio recorded. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their status as volunteers. The interviews were held separately in a natural setting for each participant. Although the option to repeat an interview was provided, no participant requested another interview session, and the researcher had enough data during the first interview and did not need a second separate

interview. Transcriptions of the interviews were sent to each participant to validate information from the first interview and allow the participant to modify her answers or provide more details.

To provide a comfortable setting and ease in responses, the interviews were conducted in both Arabic and English. The Arabic parts of the interviews were translated into English. Many factors influenced the decision to categorize a particular finding as either major or minor. These included the number of participants who mention the issue, the amount of time a participant takes to emphasize a point, and the number of times an issue was repeated by a participant.

All the audiotaped interviews were listened to and the responses of participants were carefully transcribed. To validate the responses of participants, the relevant transcribed data was sent to each participant for validation. The questions in the interviews were open-ended, i.e., rather than asking for a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, the participants were asked to give their opinions regarding the different aspects of their adjustment in the US. The interviews took place at one Midwestern research university campus in the US.

The interview questions were created using items of the short version of Weissman's 1999 Social Adjustment Scale - Self Report (SAS-SR) a guide (Gemeroff & Wickramaratne & Weissman, 2012). The SAS-SR provided an understanding of an individual's level of satisfaction with his or her social situation. The scale was often used in mental health-related issues to evaluate the efficacy of treatment and measure the satisfaction of an individual's social state by revealing the effect the treatment was having on the respondent (Gemeroff, Wickramaratne, and Weissman, 2012, p. 57). The literature on the acculturation and adaptation challenges facing the Arab females in general, and the Saudi female students studying abroad in specific (Alharthi, 2005 and Abdullah et al., 2015) was used to both create additional interview questions and shape the questions that were guided by the SAS-SR. The initial questions were



reviewed and revised with the help of peer debriefer. The final interview questions could be found in Appendix D.

### **Validity Procedures**

The study involved three different validity procedures because of its adoption of a criticalist paradigm. The validity procedures included research reflexivity, collaboration, and peer debriefing. In researcher reflexivity, the researcher self-disclosed biases and assumptions that might have shaped her inquiry. Once the researcher's own biases and assumptions were outlined, the next step for validation was that of collaboration, i.e., to obtain credible data, throughout the research. There was a close collaboration with the participant in regards to the information provided in the interviews. The participants were sent the interviews to read their narratives. The participants were allowed to make changes and delete answers if needed. Finally, peer-debriefing took place to further validate the data. Both the data analysis and the research process were reviewed by a peer familiar with the research. The peer reviewer role was to criticize the researcher's assumptions and research methodology, data, interpretations, etc. The main goal behind the use of a peer-debriefer was to ensure the quality research by questioning the content and pointing out weaknesses that needed to be addressed. In this study, peer debriefing was performed with the help of two peer reviewers; one who was a local student while the other was a Saudi student. The Saudi debriefer highlighted cultural references that could lead to sensitive and risky content that was not helpful to the researcher. Moreover, the presence of the peer reviewer from a different background provided the researcher with insights about the research from different cultural perspectives. It is essential to add to this section the possible validity risk associated with the researcher's biases. The following section provides clarification on the researcher's experiences that affected the study results.

## **Researcher's Positionality**

I am a doctoral student who is a recipient of the Saudi governmental sponsorship. I am in the U.S. as a student in a Humanity based Ph.D. program. My dependents include my husband and our two children. I grew up in the U.S. At that time, and my parents were international students completing their post-graduate degrees here. On completion of their degrees, our family returned to Saudi Arabia. I completed my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Saudi. I, then, worked for a private Saudi university with local and international students. Most of the university programs were either affiliated with American institutions or had courses taught by Western faculty. My children attended the schools of the American Embassy in Saudi Arabia. I worked and socialized with the Western expats that worked in Saudi. After working for some time in Saudi Arabia, I got Saudi government scholarship for Ph.D. studies in the U.S. When I arrived in the U.S., I was surprised to see that I faced social and cultural challenges. I did not expect the challenges because of my background experiences of living in the U.S. and having frequent interactions with the Western society in Saudi. Although I did not face any challenges related to my English language conversational skills, one of my challenges was associated with the academic expectations in writing. In addition to my personal experience, I also heard similar challenges from other Saudi female doctoral students in the U.S. This was an indication to me that there was a need to understand the adjustment related needs of this specific group. I acknowledge the existence of biases due to my similar status and background with the participants. I also recognize the importance of this connection in a collectivist society, where participants from the same culture and society as the researcher already had an established trust that results in reliable and valid data.

## **Data Analysis and Reporting**

Once the interviews took place and the responses of the participants were recorded, the next step done was the analysis of the data. This was done through extractions of the relevant data from the interviews. In her analysis process, the researcher used Carspecken's reconstructive analysis method (Carspecken, 1996). The technique consisted of the following three steps: the meaning field analysis, pragmatic horizon analysis (foreground and background), and coding. As advised by Carspecken, these steps were performed in a repeated manner (Carspecken, 1996).

To perform a meaning field analysis, different meaning fields need to be defined. Meaning fields are a range of possible meanings that could be attributed to an action. The intended meaning or purpose behind an action cannot be inferred with certainty what impressions of meanings were received by the receivers or witnesses of the act. But it was possible to identify the possibilities. This range of possible intended meanings forms the meaning field. This was a preliminary step and was prone to errors. This step was further refined with the help of peer de-briefers.

The next step in the analysis was the pragmatic horizon analysis. The analysis was used to enhance the precision of meaning reconstruction. First, the pragmatic horizon was formed along both the temporal axis and the paradigmatic axis. The temporal axis of meaning (objective, subjective, normative – evaluative and identity claims) were associated with the position, in time, of the act, i.e., it depended on the awareness of the participants of prior events and the events to come. The paradigmatic axis of meaning (foreground and background) involved the composition of sense through the observation of the manner in which the act was performed.

Finally, coding was performed at different levels to organize and sort the transcribed data. For example, at the first level of coding, open coding (which includes labeling concepts,

defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions), key concepts and categories were defined, developed and highlighted depending on the properties clarified through Berry's model and Hofstede National Cultural Model. A brief outline was generated, with the concepts represented using headings and categories represented using sub-headings. As a second level of coding, axial coding was performed. In this step, the researcher's previous concepts and categories were used to read the transcribed data again. This was done for two reasons: to ensure that the researcher's concepts and categories accurately represented the interview responses and the second goal was used to explore the relation between the concepts and categories. The researcher used inductive and deductive thinking methods to create an axial coding (the process of relating codes) and ensure that all essential aspects were identified. Finally, the identified categories and concepts were organized in tables. Initially, the researcher intended to use the qualitative research software tool, NVivo to analyze data, however, several issues highlighted in the following section made NVivo a tool not fit for the study analysis.

The next chapter focused on the findings of this study. With the help of the themes generated during the data analysis phase, the section highlights the different internal and external factors that affected the acculturation process of SFGS in the US.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Introduction to Participants**

#### **Introduction**

The main idea of this chapter was to present the study results after the analysis of the data was completed. The chapter focused on introducing the participants and summarizing their responses to the interview questions. The participants' responses were based on answering questions that eventually led to answering the following research questions of this thesis.

1. What were the biggest barriers and support factors associated with successful acculturation of Saudi Women? How did the barriers or supportive factors differ for Saudi women from different parts of Saudi (if all)?
2. What strategies were most successful in helping Saudi women adjust to studying in the United States?
3. What institutional characteristics (external) or individual characteristics (internal) were related to helping Saudi Women adjust?

#### **Participants**

In this section, the profile of each participant and their responses to the interview questions are presented. In the next subsection, the background information of each participant was presented. It bears noting at the outset that the descriptions of each participant include information about any experiences these students had during the time they were earning their masters' degree. It was important to include this information because these experiences often had a substantive impact on the adjustment of the participants.

**Participants' demographics.** In total, 13 female Saudi doctoral students were interviewed. Their demographic information was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Demographics

Name	Age Range	Marital Status	Children	Saudi Region Origin	Current Major in the US	Year of Current Major	Total No. of Years Spent in the U.S.
Dana	30 –35	Married	Yes	Central	Sciences	7 <sup>th</sup>	Over 7 years
Dalia	30 –35	Married	Yes	Central	Humanities	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5 – 7 years
Areen	30 –35	Single	No	Central	Sciences	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 – 7 years
Yara	30 –35	Single	No	Central	Sciences	5 <sup>th</sup>	5 – 7 years
Siba	26 –30	Married	Yes	Western	Humanities	4 <sup>th</sup>	1 – 4 years
Hind	26 –30	Married	Yes	Central	Sciences	6 <sup>th</sup>	Over 7 years
Saher	30 –35	Married	Yes	Central	Humanities	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 – 4 years
Nada	20 –25	Married	Yes	Central	Humanities	1 <sup>st</sup>	5 – 7 years
Nermin	30 –35	Single	No	Western	Humanities	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5 – 7 years
Maya	30 –35	Married	Yes	Western	Sciences	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 – 7 years
Nora	30 –35	Married	No	Central	Sciences	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 – 4 years
Kinzy	30 –35	Married	Yes	Western	Sciences	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5 – 7 years
Hala	41 - 45	Married	Yes	Central	Sciences	4 <sup>th</sup>	Over 10 years

**Participants' profiles.** In this subsection, the participants' profiles were presented and their responses to interview questions were presented.

***Dana (Participant 1).*** Dana was a 7<sup>th</sup> year Science major doctoral student. She was married and had 3 young children. She was born in the U.S. when her parents were international students working toward gaining U.S. degrees. The family returned to Saudi when Dana was around four years of age. Even though her parents' tribal roots were originally from the Northern Saudi Region, her family lived and worked in the Central Najd Region.

The decision for her to move and study in the U.S. was not easy. She had only been married for a few months when her husband brought up the idea of studying in the U.S. At that time, Dana felt she was not ready and needed to develop a strong bond of trust with her husband before she could take the big step of moving far away from her family, friends and familiar culture. However, after thinking more about the idea, Dana started to look at the positive aspects of moving away from her home society. Dana was motivated to enhance her career by improving her qualifications. She and her husband worked at the same university and were both obligated to gain doctoral degrees abroad. She also thought that the lack of societal obligations and cultural traditions would give her family an opportunity to develop strong relationships based on supporting one another. Dana and her husband applied to several U.S. universities listed by the department as preferred institutions. Dana received an acceptance to a Science Master's program. Her TOEFL scores allowed her to start the program immediately without the need of an English language learning program.

When Dana first arrived in the US, she and her husband stayed in Washington DC for a month to finalize formal scholarship papers at the Saudi Cultural Mission Office (SACM). While they were there, they attended an orientation program. Dana did not find the orientation beneficial. It did not include any professional academic advice, but focused more on trivial social and cultural aspects. For example, the presenter warned the students to be aware that smiles from people on the street were not invitations for a personal relationship or friendship.

After Washington, Dana traveled to her new society to begin her Master's program. Since this was the first time for her husband to travel abroad, he had depended on a travel agency in Saudi to set up the all their U.S. travel plans. They arrived tired and realized that they still had a long way to go to their city because they landed in the wrong airport. This mistake cost them

both time and money. Once they reached their new home, Dana found great support from the university and that helped her with her adjustment in the host society. She was surprised and happy when a professor from her department helped her find accommodations. The professor showed her pictures of potential house that she found on the internet and took them to visit the houses even though it was snowing. This experience left a lasting positive impression about the American people. The department orientation included information about the existing resources in the city and the academic expectations of her department. In addition to the orientation information, the support services at the international student services department helped Dana a lot to adjust to her new surroundings. Within the society, she did not find a Saudi community, but she did make lasting friendships from the Arabic and Islamic community. In her classes, Dana was fortunate to become friends with a kind and generous U.S. student. The student actively helped Dana navigate and understand the academic expectations of the U.S. educational system. Dana learned about ethical concepts in research, critical thinking and voicing opinions in class.

At home, Dana also was learning. Discussing challenges and making decisions together during their adjustment process was important to Dana and her husband. For example, Dana's financial resources were from a monthly stipend from KASP and half month's salary from the university back home where she was employed and her husband's sources of income were similar. Although they both had separate financial incomes, they faced challenges with budgeting. After several trial and error incidents, they were able to manage their spending habits.

After graduating, Dana started a Science doctoral program in a different city and university. Because of her previous experience, Dana and her husband did their own research for travel plans and finding accommodations. Although her move to a new city required adjusting to



new surroundings again, Dana felt comfortable. She was confident in her knowledge of tools and resources that could assist her adjustment process. In her new city, she found the society to be more diverse than in her previous city. The experience of interacting with different people from different nations was enriching and helped her become more tolerant of differences. Dana appreciated all the opportunities and experiences she faced during her time in the US. Whether the experiences were positive or negative, they were always helpful in her adjustment process.

Dana's time gaining her Master's degree helped her adjustment process at her doctoral program. Dana felt her adjustment as a family in the new environment was critical. Her explanations of what adjustment meant for her was focused on finding a home, knowing how to budget and on securing an understanding relationship. If she adjusted at home – she could adjust to other parts of her society.

***Dalia (Participant 2).*** Dalia was in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year of her doctoral studies. Her major field of study was in the Humanities. She was in the age range of 30 – 35 years old, was married, and had one young child. She comes from the Central Region of Najd. Her personal income resource includes a monthly stipend from KASP, while her husband owns business. When she first arrived in the U.S. in 2010, she attended an English language learning program and then completed a two years-long MBA program. After her Master's graduation, she immediately applied and was accepted in a doctoral program.

Choosing the U.S. as a destination for her doctoral studies was easy for her. Her parents and many of her extended family members lived and studied in the US. Even after her parents graduated and returned to Saudi, they spent every summer in the US. Since she already was familiar with the society, choosing the U.S. as a study destination was a natural decision to avoid challenges that came with living in a new culture.

After obtaining her Bachelor's degree, Dalia wanted to study abroad. She applied and got acceptance at several universities, but her parents would not agree to her traveling on her own. Instead of continuing her studies in Saudi, Dalia worked as branch bank manager for 6 years. As the only daughter, Dalia felt her family's strict cultural rules were focused on her. She was excited when she got engaged to a person who intended to study and live abroad. It was an opportunity to break away from traditional ideologies and also an opportunity to advance her academic qualifications.

Because of visa issues, Dalia travelled alone to the U.S. to begin her academic program. In addition to not getting a visa, her husband did not get a university acceptance. Dalia decided to wait for her husband and start her academic journey in an English language program. Since English language programs were short, she decided she would live temporarily in the city where her program existed until they find a university that accepts them both.

Even though it was her first time to travel alone outside the country, her traveling plans, accommodation and transportation arrangements were all taken care of by her father-in-law. Dana had a Saudi friend who already lived in the U.S. city she was traveling to and she also became good friends with another international student in her program. Because her language skills were good, she had no problems in her academic program. Even though she had friends, it was living alone that was difficult. She was not used to depending on herself. She had to learn how to budget, buy groceries and make her own decisions. Her husband finally joined her after a year and they moved to a different state. Unfortunately, they experienced challenges related to their marriage and divorced within a month after her husband arrived to the U.S. Dalia did not have the full support of her family who wanted a traditional female role for Dalia as a married stay at home wife. This was a challenge for her as she continued her academic journey in the

U.S. much alone. Nevertheless, Dalia was determined to get her degree. Her experience of living alone for a year gave her confidence and motivated her to apply and get accepted in a Master's program in the East Coast. However, because of visa and scholarship issues, she had to first enroll in an English language program at the same university. Her experience in the English program was beneficial for her adjustment process. The staff at the program assumed the international students had no previous knowledge of the U.S. and the U.S. educational system. They offered many services that helped the students maintain their legal status, understand the expectations of the university academic programs and navigate the social and cultural aspects of the US. She made good international friends from India, South America and different Arab speaking countries. They had a strong connection because they all came from countries that shared the same social and cultural values. Their understanding was important, especially with the knowledge that the Saudi students avoided her because she was divorced and living alone. Dalia observed that many of the Saudi students that came from the same region were more conservative than the people back home. She believes that the forceful display of home culture was to prove to members of their society back home that they had not been "Westernized or liberalized" and had kept their identity.

After completing her Master's degree, Dalia started a doctoral program in a university on the West Coast. Having lived in two different states and studied in two different U.S. institutions, she felt that she faced less challenges during her adjustment process in the new community. The city she lived in was ethnically diverse. Dalia felt fortunate that she always found herself to be part of an academic international community that matched her identity as an international student. The students moved in a slow and cautious pace and cultural and academic mistakes were expected by the university staff. It was at the university that she met her American

(Muslim) husband. Her parents were again not fully supportive, but were accepting of the marriage. On the other hand, her husband's family was supportive and welcoming of her. Her husband finished his program and had to move to the Midwestern Region for work. She moved with him and commuted between the two states to continue her program. However, after she had a baby, the traveling became difficult. Dalia applied to a similar program at a nearby university. Her excellent grades allowed her scholarship providers (SACM) to transfer. Dalia was in her fourth state since she arrived to the US.

Dalia did not feel the environment at her new university was as welcoming as her previous diversely populated institutions. In her school, there were few international students she could connect with. Most of the students were from Asia and from communities that were not similar culturally to the Arab community. In her department, she felt discriminated against by the professors. One of her professors would repeatedly remind her how "we write and work in this country". In addition, their knowledge of the policies concerning international student was minimal resulting in inaccurate guidance. She found the challenges depressed her as she felt ostracized from her academic community. However, her persistence was motivated by her past experiences, her goal to gain a doctoral degree and driven by strong faith. She believes her adjustment experience had made her a better Muslim. She feels independent and less a "pretender" following society practices of belief to please them.

***Areen (Participant 3).*** Areen was a 4<sup>th</sup> year of Science major doctoral student. She was single and was from the Najd Central Region.

Although both of her elder sisters were pursuing their doctoral degrees abroad (one in the UK and the other in the US), she was unsure that she should continue her studies. Although her academic job required her to gain her doctoral from a foreign country, it did not define a

timeframe. Although her family were supportive of her idea to gain a higher degree, they were wary of the idea of living and studying abroad alone. She had no husband, and from the societal perspective, the idea of traveling alone could indirectly reduce her chances of getting married. Fortunately for her, this was not a difficult obstacle to pass. One of her elder sisters studying abroad was single, and because of her experience, had already provided her younger sister with an open door that was not blocked by a “social and cultural barrier”. A year after her elder sister left, the university started to encourage Areen to start thinking about her doctoral degree. Areen’s challenge was her fear of instability and leaving her comfort zone. At that time in her life, she had a stable academic career as a teacher assistant and a salary that allowed her to live comfortably. She was happy with her lifestyle and had even just bought a new recliner for herself. She was not sure if leaving behind her stable job and life was a good idea. However, her elder sisters encouraged her to think about her future, leave her comfort zone and take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad. Areen agreed and chose the U.S. to be her study destination. Areen believed that by going to the US, she would gain quality content of knowledge and expert research experience. Her Saudi undergraduate and Master’s degree did not provide her with a satisfactory educational experience. Both program had faculty that used outdated teaching methods and taught from an outdated curriculum. She noted that the university itself had knowledge of the poor quality and for that reason encouraged their academic staff to enroll in doctoral programs abroad, despite the availability of local doctoral programs.

When Areen first arrived in the U.S. in 2012, she attended a mandatory orientation organized by the university’s international students’ services office. During the orientation, the staff helped her complete her formal paperwork. The experience left Areen with a pleasant experience as she found out that American people were friendlier and more welcoming than she

had expected. Despite meeting the required TOEFL score, Areen's GMAT score did not meet the admission requirements of the doctoral program. Even though she did not need to work on her language skills, she decided to enroll in the university's English language program and spend the time working on improving her entrance exam scores. As soon as she completed the requirements, she was accepted into the science doctoral program.

Areen's science department was ethnically diverse. In addition to U.S. professors and students, there were many Asian faculty members and students. She remembered when she walked into her first class, she was anxious and nervous. She did not engage or ask questions during the class time. She was afraid that she was going to say something wrong and she also did not want to miss any information said. But her professor in her first class was supportive. He approached her and encouraged her to ask because all questions were good questions. She immediately felt at ease and felt that was a good starting experience for her. Her first couple of semesters were full of friendly and supportive students and faculty. She felt positive and excited about her academic experience. However, as she progressed in her program, the environment changed. Her course professors were less supportive and had high "impossible" expectations. She became discouraged and engaged less with her department. She was happy when she was done with her coursework and did not need to attend classes. She felt that being a woman in the Science field was the reason why she was facing difficulty. The professors were harder on her than the male students. It surprised her how few women there were in her advanced classes. In Saudi, women opt for a science oriented field more than the humanities.

As Areen adjusted in the US, she felt that the experiences she went through changed her. She felt that the difficulties she faced pushed her to find solutions within her faith. The diverse social relationships she experienced helped her understand and accept different views. She

learned how to respect differences and avoid being judgmental. Areen thinks she had matured a lot during her adjustment process. She found herself to be more resilient, stronger, and independent.

***Yara (Participant 4).*** Yara was in her 5<sup>th</sup> year of her Science major doctoral program. When she first moved to the U.S. she was single, during her fourth year in her program she got married and her husband moved to the US. Yara's family was originally from the Northern Region but she grew up with her family in the Central Region of Najd. Before starting her doctoral studies in the US, she attended a one and a half year long English language program at the same university.

Yara had always wanted to gain her doctoral degree from a university abroad. She wanted quality education. She was not satisfied with the standard of education in the Saudi universities. When she first shared the idea with her family, they were worried and scared. They feared the reaction of the society as it was not common for an unmarried girl to study and live abroad on her own. Her family thought she should wait and get married first and travel with her husband. She consulted a faculty member who just graduated from a U.S. university. The professor told Yara that if she worked independently and had all the arrangements set, her parents would feel bad for not agreeing after all Yara's hard work. Yara knew that her parents supported her idea to study abroad but were afraid of society's backlash on the opinion that a woman was not able to achieve things on her own. She decided to prepare everything in hope that it would prove to her parents that she was ready to be independent. Her choice of the U.S. as a study destination was motivated by her knowledge that most of the experts in her field of studies worked in the US. Similarly, most of the well-regarded academic conferences in her field were held in the US. During her preparations to apply for universities, she received a lot of help

from colleagues at her university department where she worked. She also attended workshops organized by her university's scholarship office. One of the workshops was about writing a statement of purpose which she found helpful. She also found good advice from discussions on online student platforms. On the other hand, she did not find the U.S. Saudi Cultural Mission Office (SACM) website helpful because the information was never updated. Once she received approvals from the university scholarship office and from the U.S. university program, she sat with her parents and showed them her work. Their response was supportive, once they saw that she was serious about her decision and ready to take the risks associated with it, they started helping her get ready for her academic journey. Her father helped with processing her paperwork at the Ministry of Education and her mother decided that she would go with her. Yara appreciated her parents' support, she knew that the responses from society would not be easy to face. In the following weeks, up until the travel date, Yara's parents received daily phone calls and visits from extended relatives and family friends. The conversations were full of discouraging notes and criticism in hopes that Yara's parents would go back on their decision. The responses reminded Yara's father of his challenging experience when he was getting ready to travel abroad. Yara's parents both studied and lived abroad when Yara was an infant. It was fortunate that her father lived the same experience, his understanding made him to insist on his position and allow his daughter to travel despite the negative reactions.

Yara traveled to the U.S. with her mother and her younger brother. Even though her brother could only stay for a week because he had school, his presence was important as a Mehram. Yara and her family stopped in Washington before traveling to her university town. She did not find her time at SACM beneficial. She was expecting a more supportive role in helping students become aware of important legal issues and student's rights.



Although, Yara missed the international student orientation, the office staff were helpful in answering questions and making sure her papers were in order. Since she arrived after the academic semester started, Yara and her mother lived in a hotel because most of the rentals in the city had already been occupied. Yara started her language classes and one of the Saudi girls in her class was kind and helped her find a place to rent. Yara's mother was a huge help to her. Since her mother spoke good English, she often went out on her own. She quickly made good friends from the Islamic community that helped Yara with buying furniture and a car. Her mother gave her good advice on how to find resources and live in a foreign environment. She applied to SACM to assign her mother as her dependent for financial and health insurance support, but her request was declined because only husbands, children and siblings were considered dependents in the scholarship program. Although her mother was a great support during Yara's adjustment process, her visa status did not allow her to stay more than 6 months. The absence of a dependent visa for her mother was also problematic because without the dependent status, her mother was not eligible for medical insurance. After her mother left, Yara was on her own.

Yara's experience at the language program was not good. The staff at the program were strict and treated them as if they were young children in grade school. Yara had to take some days off because she had to travel to take her GRE test. The doctoral program she applied to had a highly competitive admission process and required excellent GRE scores. The GRE Testing times were usually set on weekdays. Her teachers at the English program did not accept her excuse and would mark her absent affecting the report that was sent to Yara's scholarship office. Maintaining a high grade and regular attendance was a scholarship requirement. Although it was obvious that Yara did not need to improve her language skills, the staff were not understanding

and told her that she was not serious about her education. The lack of understanding from her teachers and the staff at the English program upset her. When she received her program's acceptance letter, she was happy to be free of the institute's 'tight grip'. Although Yara's experience at her department was better than her experience at the language program, she still faced challenges. Her confidence level was low and she felt like the weakest student in her class because she believed her educational background was poor in comparison with the other students. She did not join any class discussions in fear she would embarrass herself.

Even though Yara faced challenges at the university, Yara enjoyed being in the US. One of the things she immediately started working towards was getting her driver's license. Driving her sports car was considered one of her top benefits of living abroad. She enjoyed that people had the habit of smiling to others even if they did not know them. However, Yara was not social and did not make many friends in the US. She was not interested in the university events unless they had a scientific and academic goal. Her lack of interest in a social circle was enhanced as she faced discrimination from bus drivers because she looked different. Similarly, at her department, the overall academic environment between the students was competitive. She noticed that if a member of her cohort felt threatened because of her knowledge on a certain topic, they would start verbal attacks on her country; "Saudi people have a lot of money and are not responsible". When things became tough for Yara and she felt discouraged, she would call her sister for support.

***Siba (Participant 5).*** Siba was a Humanities major doctoral student. She was in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of her doctoral program. She was from the Western Region of Saudi.

Siba moved to the U.S. because her husband was starting his doctoral program. They left for the U.S. a few days after their wedding. Before leaving for the US, her aunt advised her to

befriend other Saudi girls in the U.S. because they could help her and therefore be an important part of her life in the US. Her husband had already set up their accommodations before they arrived in the US. Siba never intended on studying in the US. She believed her language skills were too weak. She depended a lot on her husband to translate for her. However, within a few months after she arrived, Siba decided that she did not want to wait for her husband to help her anymore. She wanted to do things for herself by herself, so, she took the decision to enroll in the English language program. Siba was never particularly fond of her Saudi school's English language classes. However, she found that practicing her language skills with different people in the community helped with her learning. After one year in the program, her husband started to encourage her to enroll into the Master's program at a university. Siba was not confident that she had a good academic background, but she decided she was not going to lose anything by applying. Siba was accepted and completed the two-year long Master's program in the field of Humanities. Her success encouraged her to immediately apply to the doctoral program in the same department.

Siba made some international friends at the English language institute but did not find much time to make friends at the university as she had a baby during that time and was too busy with studies. She did work on group projects with other international students. She was happy with the professors in her department. She found that the professors were all welcoming especially due to the fact that she was the only Saudi female student in the department although there were many male Saudi students there. One of the female professors approached her to see if she could be her supervisor. During her Master's studies, Siba made some American friends as well. They were mostly mothers whom she met at the daycare where she used to take her child.

She found it comforting that she had friends who were mothers like herself. By that time, she felt good about her adjustment process into the U.S. culture.

After Siba's husband completed his doctoral program, they both had to return to Saudi. She had completed her Master's in the U.S. and was keen to gain her doctoral degree from her same university. After she returned to Saudi, she worked on obtaining her degree from the same university in the U.S. and took online classes. Because she had no financial support, she applied and was accepted to work as an academic at a Saudi university. The university offered a sponsorship that supported her return to the U.S. and completion of her doctoral program.

About her time in the US, Siba appreciated the fact that in the she could go out alone for a walk without anyone assistance. She also liked the weather in the US. Siba believed that the support of her husband and that of her host university in the Saudi were the biggest factors in her academic success.

***Hind (Participant 6).*** Hind was in her 6<sup>th</sup> year of her doctoral studies. Her major field of study was in the Sciences. She fell in the age range of 26 – 30 years old, was married, and had children. She was from the Central Region of Saudi. Her mother was a high school math teacher and her father was a nuclear engineer and owns business. Hind was from a conservative family background, and like other conservative families, her parents were strict in maintaining religious and cultural values and tradition. Her family didn't own a TV, they had no family employed driver, they didn't go out except to go to school and they never traveled outside of Saudi.

Hind's undergraduate academic experience disappointed her, she was not satisfied with the quality of science education at her university. In her third year, Hind was taught by a professor who graduated from the US. Hind admired her professor, she was different from the other faculty of the department. She engaged the students in activities and introduced the class to

current research studies in the field. Hind was motivated by her professor and decided that if she ever had the chance, she would pursue her post-graduate studies in the US. In her senior year, Hind became engaged to a person who was already studying and living in the US. She was excited about her new life for two reasons, it was a chance to move away from her restricted life and an opportunity to gain a degree from the US. Because of her professor and through her readings, she was sure that the U.S. had the best environment for research in the field of science. Before going to the US, Hind worked on transferring her bachelor's credits in Saudi to the bachelor's Science program at the university where her husband was studying.

Hind arrived in the U.S. as a bride. Unfortunately, she missed the orientation programs offered by the university. She did not attend any preparatory program or meet any official staff member in Saudi before she left or in the U.S. after she arrived. Her husband was not supportive. He did not understand why she needed help to adjust, after all, he was doing well in his program and adjusted within the culture of his society without any problems. He told her that he couldn't help her because she needed to work on herself to adjust. Her sense of discouragement that came from his passive response was amplified by the non-existent support from her department. Hind followed her mother's advice and wore a purple abaya all the time. The abaya caught many people's attention at the university and student in her class looked at her with curiosity but looked away when she tried to catch their eye. She did not get help from the professors, they seemed to avoid her and responded to her questions with short answers. She observed that the professors treated her differently from the other students who were also avoiding interacting with her. The only time she remembers anyone talking to her was when one Asian student found out she came from Saudi. His words to her were hurtful as he said that Saudi was famous for two things; petrol and terrorism. She felt insulted and ostracized, but at that point she wasn't

confident or strong enough to respond. She felt that her home system disappointed her. Although she knew she was a smart student and was academically prepared for the program, she not prepared at all to face the diverse culture of the university within the broad setting of the American culture. She needed resources of guidance before her arrival and during her time in the US. Hind looked for social support within the Saudi female community, however she found that she could not connect with the other ladies and that they did not understand her challenges. This was mostly because the majority of the women were either not students or just wanted to study the language at the university institute. Hind found comfort at the Islamic Center of the Mosque. The diverse community of Muslim ladies were welcoming; however, they were also far away from the academic environment to understand Hind's challenges. Hind isolated herself to escape from her disappointing surroundings. At home, Hind would talk to her mother who was a close source of emotional support. Unfortunately, her mother's support was not helpful with the issues related to her adjustment at the university.

Hind was adamant about getting the U.S. quality education she wanted. She decided to observe the students and faculty of her department to learn the tools she needed to adjust and benefit from her academic surrounding. She watched how students in her class interacted with the professors and how the students talked with each other and agree to create study groups. She began practicing different methods when approaching her professors, she would take notes, and ask questions in class. She also asked a student study group to include her in their meetings. She slowly adjusted and became familiar with the different social systems in her department. She also learned that differences were not appreciated and were not an important part of the department 's culture. She decided to remove her abaya because she felt it made her stand out and created a 'barrier' between her and her academic environment.

After she completed her undergraduate studies, Hind was accepted into the Master's program at the same university. She was interested in taking part of and learning about research in her field. She sent a request to a professor that supervised a student research group and was accepted as a member. In the beginning, she was happy and excited that she finally was going to learn about research, however, the group and the professor were not welcoming of her. The negative experience included recurring incidents where her professor at the research group would always send her harsh emails (in which other members of the group were also copied). She was discouraged because of the email content, "I don't think you will finish your work. Your progress was below average."

Although discouraged by the challenges she faced, Hind was a good student and she was persistent. She completed her Master's degree and applied to the doctoral program in the same department. The doctoral program required less interaction with the other students and more individual based projects. This made Hind more comfortable in completing with her work but she still suffered from the social aspects in her department. She did not pass her qualification exam/candidacy seminar in her first attempt. She felt her professor did not prepare her well for it. During the seminar, one of the professors made fun of the way she pronounced some words. When she was called by the committee to inform her that she had not passed, she was told: "Your culture is affecting you. You come from a different culture. You have potential but your culture is a barrier." She felt she was also being targeted for being a female and that if other female students in the department supported each other, there would be less upsetting experiences. Failing the exam was a wake-up call for her. She focused on the "you have potential" part of the comments that she received and took it as a compliment. She also attended meetings intended to support women who were members of the in the Science, Technology,

Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field and found it a good place to gain strength. She then changed her advisor. Her new advisor was kind and supportive. She asked him not to consider her culture as a barrier and that she could do anything that students of other ethnicities could do. She told herself that if she did not stand up for herself, no one would help her. Another thing which helped her was having a daughter. She wanted to be a role model for her daughter.

Hind felt she transformed during her time in the doctoral program. She had clarity about how she wanted to be seen by members of her academic field. She was not as concerned with their opinions as when she first arrived to the U.S. She did not want to be identified as an oppressed, Saudi lady but as a scientist that wanted to make a difference in her field. She wanted to embrace her Islamic identity through her love of science. She came to know about a Muslim Nobel physics prize winner and this encouraged her further to continue developing her new identity. She realized it was possible to be both a Muslim and a good scientist without having to deal with the political and societal challenges that came with her identity as a Saudi female Muslim. She attended more scientific conferences and was more confident in voicing her opinion. Once, in a conference, a participant started to attack the political nature of the Saudi government. She found the courage to tell him: “Sir, we are here to talk about science.”

About her experience of living in the US, Hind thought that while the U.S. was more advanced and had a better education system, in the Saudi education system, there was no difference between male and female students in relation to the value of their academic knowledge. She did not find the same behavior in the US. Hind believed that Saudi female students coming from the Western and Eastern Regions adjusted more quickly compared to those coming from the Central Region. She also believed that students coming from metropolitan cities adjusted quickly compared to others and that family status, socioeconomic family status etc.



were also important attributes associated with quicker adjustment. Moreover, she thought the overall Saudi female doctoral student experience in the U.S. could be improved if SACM played a more supportive role e.g., by providing tutoring opportunities to students. She felt SACM had been there in the U.S. for many years and was aware of the different sets of challenges that Saudi female students had been facing in the U.S. over the years. SACM had the ability to predict the student's problematic issues and prepare the prospective students to be ready to take on the challenges of life in the U.S.

***Saher (Participant 7).*** Saher was in her 1<sup>st</sup> year of her doctoral program. Her major field of study was in the Humanities. She fell in the age range of 30 – 35 years old, was married, and had children. She comes from the Central Region of Saudi.

Saher completed her Master's degree at a Saudi university. During her research work, a professor advised her to improve her English language skills if she wanted to pursue her doctoral degree in the same area of research in an English-speaking country. Sahar felt motivated by her professor's words and started to do a search on countries that offered quality education. She did some research online and discussed prospective places with her colleagues. She finally decided that the U.S. was the best study destination for her. Her husband's response to her ambition was positive. He was supportive when it came to her education. Sahar and her husband started to plan for their life abroad a year before they left to the US. Together they convinced their kids and even her parents on the benefits of this change. They moved their kids to an international school that followed an American curriculum. Sahar bought books about life in the U.S. and read them together with her family. Informing her husband's family about their intent to move was a challenge. Having the approval of parents was important to Sahar from a religious perspective. Because his family was conservative, he used a gradual approach. He first informed them that

the family was moving to a different Saudi city and a few months after they accepted the idea of that move, he carefully talked to them about their move abroad. Informing them in a gradual manner helped them accept the otherwise impossible thought of moving to a Western non-Islamic society.

Sahar's move to the U.S. was well planned. They communicated with the Saudi Student organization for advice on locations to live and schools to register their kids. Sahar and her family already had their kids in schools and their apartment rented before they arrived to the US. They also bought a car within the first two week after they arrived. Sahar intentionally arranged for most of her family's basic needs to be met before they left for the US. Sahar was conscious of the time limit her scholarship office specified to get acceptance in a doctoral program. Sahar started her U.S. academic journey in an English language program. This was partly because Sahar wanted to improve her language skills and partly because she needed to work on reaching the required admission scores on the standardized tests: the TOEFL and GRE. Within her second year in the US, Sahar was accepted into a doctoral program.

Sahar was excited about her program and wanted to make sure she benefited from all her time at the university. The first step was to choose the right classes. This was a difficult step for her to understand because at her Saudi university, her classes were usually assigned for her. Another challenge for her was related to engaging in class discussions. Her classmates were native English speakers and her inability to speak fluent English made her feel apprehensive in class. However, after her first semester, Sahar felt more comfortable in her department than when she first arrived. Most of the adjusting happened with the help of her faculty. She found her professors helpful and approachable. They gave her the time and were impressed with her

enthusiasm to learn. One faculty nominated her to speak about her Saudi culture at an annual large intercultural event. Sahar valued her professors support and encouragement.

Sahar wanted her family to benefit from the living abroad experience. She and her family signed up as members of a country park and recreation center. They had not made local friends, but she was optimistic. Saher believed that her husband's support was one of the leading reasons why her experience in the U.S. had been positive. She believed in the positive effect of the absence of outside interference from extended family members and friends from the society in their family's daily life decisions. This allowed the family members' interests to have priority over social and cultural values.

*Nada (Participant 8).* Nada was in her 1<sup>st</sup> year of her doctoral studies. Her major field of study was in the Humanities. She fell in the age range of 20 – 25 years old, was married, and had children. She comes from the Central Region of Saudi but grew up in the Western Region of Saudi. She comes from a conservative family.

Nada got engaged when she was about to finish her high school. Her fiancé was a faculty member in a Saudi university. He was obligated by his university to complete his doctoral degrees in the US, however his parents had a condition in order to allow him to live and study abroad. He had to get married and take his wife with him when he traveled to live in the US. Nada's family also had conditions, they would not allow Nada to travel until he had set up living accommodations and arrange for her to also study abroad. After they were married, Nada's husband left for the U.S. to prepare for his wife to join him. Within a month, he came back and Nada left her home to travel with him to the US.

Logistically, Nada's move to the U.S. was smooth as her husband had already prepared most of the things for her. But she was scared. She was scared she might lose her religious

identity. In the US, Nada feared the new educational system. She attended classes at the English language institute of the university where her husband was studying. She found the people at the institute helpful. They explained to her about rules and regulations of the institute e.g. the plagiarism policy etc. She also found people in the city friendly and their behavior changed her perception about the American society. One of the problems that Nada faced at the institute was that most of her classmates were Saudi male students who were friends with her husband. So, keeping the Saudi culture in mind, they avoided talking to her out of respect for her husband. This had a negative effect on her overall learning at the institute. She could not participate much in activities. She also made friends with some Saudi female students. She wanted to befriend students of other nationalities as well but they seemed confused about approaching her.

After completing her English language course, Nada was accepted into a Bachelor's program at the university. As part of her degree, she had to complete a training as a preschool teacher. There, Nada took off her Niqab (material that was used to cover the whole face except for the eyes) as she did not want to scare the kids. Afterwards, she never wore Niqab to university again. Nada also found some of her teachers at the university supportive. For example, when she was fasting, one of the teachers informed all the classmates that she was fasting and that nobody should eat in the class. Afterwards, students in her class offered to help her hold her bag and books. Overall, she found people around her were considerate and culturally aware of her background. Nada's husband's supervisor was also a compassionate lady who'd always tell her husband to treat his wife with care. Nada respected her like her mother.

Nada and husband soon completed their Bachelors and Masters degrees respectively and got accepted in their respective Masters and doctoral programs in universities at a Midwestern university. During this time, Nada's baby was born. Studying became difficult but she was

supported well by her mother who'd answer all her queries over the phone. She was most thankful to her professors in the university whose support she found the most beneficial. She also felt guilty sometimes that she had to leave her baby at the daycare while she was studying at the university. Having a baby caused her to minimize her socializing with others.

After completing her masters, Nada enrolled in a doctoral program at her university. By then, Nada and her family were fully adjusted in the US. But there was a down side to it as well. Nada feared how people back home would think about them. As her husband had started helping with cooking etc. (something that was not associated with male members of the family in the Saudi culture) and she was not wearing her Niqab anymore, their families were worried about them getting Westernized and losing their faith. But Nada was determined to go back to Saudi after finishing her studies to gain some work experience and to become a positive influence on children early in their lives. Her doctoral program supervisor encouraged her and supported her passion to help women in the Saudi society.

Summing up her experience of living in the U.S. and her plans of returning to Saudi after completing her studies, Nada shared that she had learned a lot from her experience of living in the US. To illustrate this, she narrated the story of a Saudi lady who came along with her husband from a village in Riyadh. The Saudi woman had no high school degree and did not attend any English language course during her time in the U.S. She improved her English language skills by speaking with people in her host environment. During her time in the U.S, she became interested in photography. She bought a camera and attended a photography course. After she moved back to Saudi, her photography skills were noticed and people started to ask her to take their pictures. She started her own photography business in Saudi and was a successful Saudi businesswoman. This experience taught Nada not to judge anyone and that she should not

hold stereotypical views about people coming from a particular Region or from a particular background and that every individual had the capacity to succeed regardless of his/her background/culture etc. Nada also shared that the Saudi people in Saudi were gradually changing. They were becoming more accepting of the U.S. culture. Moreover, she thought there was no need for formal orientation sessions for prospective Saudi female students in the US. She thought information about every aspect of the U.S. culture could be understood through social media and that social media was a big and powerful tool which had removed the fear of a different culture from peoples' minds. She thought there was a lot of misconception about the Saudi culture in the U.S. (e.g., people thought all the Saudis were rich. Similarly, she said that many people thought all women covered their faces because their husbands told them to do so, which was also not true. She thinks she had 'found' herself as a woman in the U.S. by being independent. She wanted to go back to Saudi and help its women in the field of education.

***Nermin (Participant 9).*** Nermin was in her 5<sup>th</sup> year of her doctoral program. Her major field of study was in the Humanities. She fell in the age range of 30 – 35 years old, was single, and wore a Hijab. She comes from the Western Region of Hijaz in Saudi. Her mother was from a neighboring Arab country and her father was Saudi. She did not have a Mehram that was with her continuously during her time in the U.S.

Before coming to the US, Nermin worked as a lecturer in a university in Saudi Arabia. She wanted to grow professionally in at her work and wanted to get a position with more authority to bring about changes in the way things worked. there. For this, Nermin knew she needed to advance her qualifications. When the university offered her scholarship for studying abroad, Nermin thought it was an opportunity not to miss. She wanted to get exposed to better standards of education to become an effective teacher. After she got positive feedback from her

U.S. graduated colleagues about living in the U.S, she decided the U.S. was the best place to further her studies.

Nermin got admission in a master's program in a university in a southern U.S. state. Her brother also accompanied her to the US. Before leaving for the US, Nermin attended a short lecture delivered by EducationUSA, a section of the U.S. Embassy in Saudi that attends to issues related to education in the U.S., but she did not find it useful. There was another orientation session organized by the Ministry of Education, but she could not attend it. When she arrived in her new city, she attended another orientation program organized by her university. She found it helpful. She remembered she learned information about the F1 visa, the immigration regulations, university etc. She felt welcomed in the event.

During her Master's program, she got connected to a professor through her Saudi professor. She was a kind and helpful lady. Nermin felt her professor to be a blessing and big gift from Allah. After her first year in the US, her brother left for Saudi. She was alone then. One of the problems Nermin faced was that she started feeling home sick especially in the month of Ramadan and longed for the Ramadan environment in Saudi. But she soon found a nearby Mosque where she found a family-like environment. It helped her adjust better and reduced her home sickness. She also got a lot of help from other Muslim families in her neighborhood. She felt particularly lucky to be in a city where people were educated and tolerant. She praised the ethics and morals of the people in the US. She was happy that her teacher trusted her and that when she was sick and could not attend a lecture her teacher trusted her and did not ask her to produce a doctor's letter. Similarly, when she visited a shop and the seller said: "as long as you are happy", surprised her. She praised the high level of ethics she experienced. In her academic department, Nermin was nervous in her master's program. She thought other students had better

educational background compared to her. But she overcame her nervousness when she reminded herself that she was in the best place in the world to gain quality educational. She generally felt welcomed of her and made a good hiking friend.

After she completed her master's degree, Nermin enrolled in a doctoral program at a Midwestern university. In the beginning of her time in her new city, Nermin did not socialize much but about two years into her doctoral program, she started feeling the need for socializing. She decided to do some volunteer work. As part of her volunteer work, she tutored students in the Arabic Flagship program. She thought volunteering in the U.S. was different from volunteering in the Saudi. She felt the process was more organized in the US.

About her overall experience in the US, Nermin thought studying and living in the U.S. had allowed her to 'find' herself. She could not do that in Saudi. She thought, in the US, she had grown as a person and thus she did not want to go back. About SACM's role in her adjustment, Nermin thought she did not receive any guidance from SACM and that SACM needed to become more active in solving Saudi students' problems. She thought due to lack of guidance from SACM, young Saudi students usually indulged in activities which had a negative effect on their studies.

***Maya (Participant 10).*** Maya was in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of her doctoral program. Her major field of study was in the Sciences. She fell in the age range of 30 – 35 years old, was married, and had children. She comes from the Western Region of Saudi, but grew up in the Central Region.

Maya was teaching at a Saudi university when she got engaged to her husband, who had just received his Bachelor's degree from a U.S. university. After they were married, Maya applied for funding at her university and received a scholarship to gain her doctoral degree from



the US. Before moving to the US, Maya attended the compulsory orientation session organized by the Ministry of Education, but did not find it useful. She thought they needed to convey more realistic knowledge about the challenges of life in the US. Luckily, Maya's mother had a friend in Washington who worked at SACM. She helped facilitate the process of submitting and finalizing all her paperwork.

Moving to the U.S. was a big step for Maya as she had never lived without her parents. Getting married and moving to the U.S. were two big steps for her. Her husband prepared all living arrangements before they came to the US. Before moving to the US, Maya had already visited many Western countries along with her family and was not nervous about her living experience in the U.S. Her husband was supportive and the support of her family back home also proved helpful for her adjustment to her new life in the US.

Maya and her husband lived first in a southern state to attend an English language program. They were looking for acceptance at a university in the same state. The institute organized a mandatory orientation that Maya found useful. The orientation provided them with tips on where to shop and how to interact with members from the society. Maya and her husband were both looking for acceptance in the same program, because of that they spent most of their time together and did not socialize much. Maya made friends with one Saudi student who had her parents with her. Spending time with elderly Saudi parents made her feel less homesick.

After spending six months at the institute, Maya and her husband found acceptance at a Master's program at a Midwestern university and moved to their new city. Maya did not feel there were obstacles with moving to her new home. The orientation program organized by the university helped them with their registration process. Maya and her husband found a house with

help from a Saudi friend who already lived in their new city. After a few months, she was happy when her family from back home visited and stayed for a couple of months.

At her school, Maya did face challenges. Her class material was difficult and she lacked courage to participate in the class. At the end of every class, she would approach her professors and ask questions. They were supportive and gave Maya time to answer her questions. Their behavior showed they were aware of the culture differences and were culturally sensitive. With the encouragement from her professors, Maya started to gain confidence slowly, especially after she received comments for her first submitted research assignment. She felt that she was up to par with her classmate in her academic background.

However, changes that happened to Maya's family affected her engagement in the society. Soon after she started her Master's program, Maya had her first baby. Once the doctors allowed her to travel, Maya's mother took the baby to Saudi. This step was important to help Maya focus on her studies. Maya found the facility of free video internet calls useful. She could see her baby and constantly communicate with her mother. Maya and her husband completed their Master's degrees in two years and eventually got accepted into the doctoral program at the same university.

In her doctoral program, Maya gained more confidence in her academic knowledge and ability to do research. Maya and her husband started to engage socially with her professors and their families. They were invited to Thanksgiving dinners which Maya appreciated. She felt that the invitations from her professors to traditional events broke a cultural barrier she was used to. Teachers in Saudi always kept their distance from the students, while in the US, they had a stronger bond with the students. Maya and her husband did not feel the need to ask the Saudi association or anyone else for help as they would do most of the things by themselves. After the

unfortunate event of the death of Maya's father, her mother visited more often and for longer each time. Maya's baby returned to live with them and was admitted at a daycare where she met other mothers with young children. Maya did not like socializing with other Saudi female students as she saw having periodical gatherings as a burden she did not want to have. She liked going to gathering where she and her husband could go together. These were mostly house warming parties or birthdays of their international friends.

About her experience of living in the US, Maya expressed that she did not face any challenges in the U.S. with respect to her religious identity. She said that after holiday breaks, many students would hug and shake hands with each other but they would not do that with her as they understood her culture. She thought living in the U.S. had made her a more responsible and independent person. She was a bit worried about going back to Saudi as she cherished her lifestyle here in the U.S. but she was also a bit optimistic as she thought many Saudis were already exposed to the U.S. culture. So, when they go back to Saudi, there would be many people who would be accommodating of their views. She was looking forward to going back to Saudi and continuing her teaching and research career. She also thought that the educational experience she gained at her Saudi university played a key role in her adjustment in the US. It was one of the biggest and largest universities in the Saudi and had a strong science program. The university prepared her well for her challenges in the US. She thought other Saudi female students who could not adjust well in the U.S. mostly, came from smaller cities and smaller universities which did not prepare their students and faculty well for their lives in the US. Such scholars also faced a lot of cultural and social misunderstandings.

***Nora (Participant 11).*** Nora was her 2<sup>nd</sup> year of her doctoral program. Her major field of study was in the Sciences. She was in the range of 30 – 35 years old, was married, and did not

have children. She comes from the southern Region of Saudi but grew up in the Central Region. She did not wear a Hijab and her home culture was deeply engrained in the importance of maintaining tribal culture.

At the time, Nora finished her high school in Saudi, she got admission in a university there. She went against her family's wishes who wanted her to study in a college and enroll in a different program. Nora's decision of attending a university was made easy by her sister who had already fought for her right to study in a nursing school with a co-education setup. Nora's family had many people related to the medical profession and she was also expected to study the same field. But she chose another program in the Sciences. When she started university in Saudi, she was surprised to find the students to be liberal and many spoke fluent English because they lived abroad. Nora completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the same university in Saudi Arabia.

After obtaining her Master's degree, Nora wanted to gain her doctoral degree abroad. She was motivated by her interest to explore her own identity by living an independent life. She chose U.S. as her study destination based on her personal experience having learned from both U.S. and UK graduated faculty. She thought the U.S. graduate studies faculty was more effective and were better, particularly at research. In the meantime, Nora got married. Her husband supported her idea of pursuing a doctoral degree. He lived in the U.S. as a child and was excited about the prospect of going back to the US. On the other hand, Nora found it difficult to convince her mother of her decision. Her mother was an elderly widow and was afraid that Nora would not return, Nora convinced her that she would return after completing her studies.

Before leaving for the US, Nora did not get any orientation at her university in Saudi Arabia. She believed the information provided to her by the relevant resources at her host

university in Saudi were insufficient and were not helpful. She mostly learned about the U.S. universities and its culture through the internet.

Nora first arrived to Washington to finalize their paperwork at SACM. She did not find the staff at SACM welcoming. After that they started their academic journey at an English language program in the Midwestern Region. She found their orientation program beneficial and her classes easy. However, there were many other Saudi students at the program who openly judged her and criticized her for not wearing a Hijab. Nora became depressed and her husband suggested they move to another part of the city and another language institute where there were fewer Saudis. They moved to the suburbs where they had American neighbors. She did not interact much with her neighbors but felt more comfortable in her new setting. The language institute was more diverse and had students with different nationalities. She found students to be more tolerant in this new institute but the institute itself was not as good in its educational quality as the previous one.

Nora and her husband spent around two years at the English language institute while they searched for a university program acceptance. They finally got admission to a doctoral program at a university in a different state, but also at another Midwestern university. At her university, Nora attended a mandatory orientation program organized by the international student services. She found it useful and found the staff during orientation supportive. On the other hand, she did not find her advisor at the department supportive. She thought that their research interests did not match. She then changed her advisor to someone who was more supportive of her research ideas and provided better guidance. She felt she adjusted better at her new department because of her supportive professor.

During her time in her doctoral program, Nora did not socialize much. Having learned both Arabic and English, she sometimes mixed both the languages while speaking which she did not like. She wanted to be able to complete sentences in Arabic when she was speaking to Saudis as otherwise, people would think she was forgetting her Arabic roots. Apart from her mother and her sister, her husband was a source of emotional support for her. She kept in touch with her family through the internet. But above all, when she was stressed out, she headed to the gym to work out and thought it worked best for her.

Nora shared that she and her husband faced some financial difficulties as they were not earning as much as they were earning when they were in Saudi where both had jobs. In the US, her husband was only receiving a stipend as her dependent. But she thought she had grown as a person in the U.S. and living in the U.S. had allowed her to explore her abilities. She had advice for the Saudi associations. She thought the associations only comprised of conservative male members of the Saudi community. If the associations included a more diverse set of Saudi members, more people would be willing to join it. About adjustment, she thought she had more obstacles than students who came from the Saudi Western Region of Hijaz. The students that came from the Western Region were used to seeing different cultures and practices while she felt she had a difficult time adjusting to an environment that she was not familiar with. She felt that it was necessary that Saudis did not restrict themselves to socialize with communities of their respective regions, but also engage with people from different regions. She felt this would help the Saudi students learn from and respect each other's different cultures.

***Kinzy (Participant 12).*** Kinzy was in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year of her doctoral program. Her major field of study was in the Sciences. She fell in the age range 30 – 35 years old, was married, and had children. She was from the Western Region of Saudi Arabia. Her mother was from a

neighboring Arab country and her father was Saudi. She was the eldest of her siblings and had always been responsible for looking after everyone in her family, including her parents.

Kinzy's mother taught her and her siblings French and English during their childhood. Kinzy was known in her family as an independent and responsible person. After completing her bachelor's degree in Saudi Arabia, Kinzy got a job as a university lecturer. As part of her job in the university, she was required to study abroad to gain her doctoral degree. She also wanted to go abroad for higher studies. Kinzy's parents were supportive of the idea of her pursuing higher studies. After working for two years at the university, Kinzy got married. Her husband also had a scholarship for studying abroad. So, they both decided to get admission in universities in the US.

Kinzy's preparation for her U.S. life started with extensive online searches about things she wanted to know. She, along with her husband, also attended a workshop organized by the U.S. consulate intended for Saudi scholars who were going to the US. She thought the workshop was not bad but she was uncomfortable with the way the staff was anticipating the experience of Saudi students in the US.

Kinzy and her husband arrived in the U.S. in 2010. On the day of their travel to the US, they spent a lot of time at the airport, particularly, at the customs desk. Similarly, on their arrival in the US, they had to spend two days visiting SACM to complete paperwork. She thought this entire process was inconvenient.

After completing their paperwork at SACM, Kinzy and her husband traveled to their new city where they were both enrolled as students in the English language program. Kinzy's extensive internet research about the U.S. was fruitful. She felt as if she already knew the place. She did not feel like a stranger. She liked to be fashionable and used to wear different styles of Hijab all the time. Her Hijab did not cause her any issues. She felt happy when she finally met

her husband's friends and their families as they came from the Western Region of Hijaz as well. She felt at home with them. Kinzy and her husband moved in the same neighborhood as their friends. Eventually, she found out there was an issue with living within a close Saudi circle and that was that she could not experience new things and was not learning anything new. She wanted to go to different workshops and other social events that the university organized but could not attend them as neither her husband, nor her Saudi friends were interested in going there. She regretted her decision of not attending the events on her own.

After completing her language course, Kinzy was accepted in a Master's program in the same city. She did not transfer her credits from the courses she had attended in Saudi as she thought her educational background was weak and that she should register for the full program to learn more. She regretted this decision as she thought she wasted a lot of time by doing that and that her educational background was not that weak after all. During this time, she also had her first baby. Unfortunately, Kinzy's husband had to move to another city for his studies. That was a difficult time for Kinzy since she had to take care of studies, her baby, and do house chores all by herself. But she thought she had the kind of personality where she enjoyed taking responsibility and doing things on her own for her family. When she had her second baby, she took herself to the hospital and did not ask for help. Eventually, she also learned to drive a car. She described her experience as liberating when she passed her driving test. She felt owning and driving a car was important to feeling completely independent.

After finishing her Master's program, she got acceptance in a doctoral program in a Midwestern university. At her new university, she attended an orientation program organized by her department and found it useful. At the department, Kinzy was supervised by a famous professor in the department but she thought she did not learn much from her as she was a busy



person. Her supervisor later introduced her to a young professor whom Kinzy found helpful and who later became Kinzy's supervisor. Kinzy and her new supervisor presented one of their papers together. She thought her interactions with her new supervisor were valuable. During that time, she decided to leave the babies with a babysitter. She did not trust every other advertisement and followed her university's official advertisement website. Eventually, she found two babysitters through the university website. They were undergrad students at the university. With time, the babysitters became a familiar part of her family. They were helpful, they would alternate their babysitting time based on their class schedules. During her time in her doctoral program, Kinzy found it difficult to socialize with the Saudi community as she thought they were judgmental of her lifestyle decisions. For example, one of the Saudi ladies told her: “why don't you live with your husband because it was easier for you. You put your family through so many hardships.” She usually ignored such remarks but deep inside, she got hurt. When overwhelmed by such comments, she preferred to close the door after her, cry, and shout after which she felt better.

About her experience of living in the US, Kinzy felt that it had a positive impact on her. Though she had the same values as she came with from Saudi, she knew herself better and she had proved her strength to herself. She had proved to herself that she was strong, independent, and resilient. She also felt that adjustment was not dependent on the Region of origin of a person. She said it was dependent on the character of a person. She said a person had to have an open mind and had to be able to accept differences in order to better adjust. Similarly, she thought adjustment was easy when you had family with you rather than when one was alone. She also thought that parents in general and mothers in particular adjusted better as they had that extra pressure to do something for their kids. They did not want to let down their families. So, for the

betterment of their families, they accepted changes more readily, and hence, were more likely to adjust.

In terms of guidance and support, Kinzy thought the university's international office emails were helpful. It made one feel that help was always available to him/her. Moreover, she thought the support from international office could be made more effective by expanding its contents to include support for families as well. Currently, they mainly targeted single students and thus most of their support was aimed at students who were single. It would be more helpful if their support became family oriented as well. She thought it was also easy to reach out to the Saudi student association but it was seldom helpful. Lastly, Kinzy thought SACM's role needed to be expanded. Currently, it was not engaging and connecting well with the students. They also needed to be pro-active and anticipate problems rather than sending out warning emails after a problem had already occurred.

***Hala (Participant 13).*** Hala was in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of her doctoral program. Her major field of study was in the Sciences. She fell in the age range of 41 – 45 years old, was married, and had children. She comes from the Central Region of Saudi Arabia.

Hala went to school in the U.S. when her father was working on gaining his doctoral degree. She lived in the U.S. with her family for 15 years. When Hala finished her high school in the US, she returned to Saudi and attended a university there. She found it difficult to adjust to her new environment as people thought she was a strong headed Westernized girl. She wanted to become an engineer and a pilot but was always shushed and told it was impossible in her new environment. Because of her difficult adjustment, her grades suffered in her university. She was one of the top students in her high school but her grades dropped at the university. She found it difficult to learn in her classes that were taught in Arabic.

After completing her bachelor's degree, Hala decided to teach English at different public schools. Because of her English language skills, she was offered jobs at many prestigious private schools but she wanted to work on improving the area of learning and teaching for females in the public sector. She worked as a language teacher at a public school. There, she initiated the idea of and completed the implementation of computer assisted learning. She did not get much help from her school or other teachers in the school but her efforts were finally rewarded by the Ministry of Education which asked her to help introduce the same computer assisted learning system in all the schools of Riyadh. This was an honor for her. But it came with its problems. For example, the parents started complaining that she had exposed their kids to the internet and how they were vulnerable to visiting objectionable websites. After this, her principle literally told her not to use the word "internet" in her class. She left her job and went into depression. She found it difficult to share her problems with anyone as she thought it would ruin her reputation which she had been told to be careful about. Then, she went to a couple of therapists. She thought that was the turning point in her life. She saw an American female therapist and a Saudi male therapist and both encouraged her to pursue her dreams and perhaps go abroad for higher studies.

Hala decided to go back to the U.S. and complete her studies there. Her parents did not agree with this. They said it was not acceptable in the society that a girl studied abroad alone. She was mad about this, especially, after her brother was given permission go to the U.S. for completing his studies. Her father was mostly supportive of her while her mother did not approve of her 'non-Saudi' behavior. When Hala got engaged, she told her fiancé about her desire of getting admission in a U.S. university. He agreed to this and she filed her papers for scholarship. The department committee invited her for an interview but she was not granted the opportunity because of the low grades associated with her Arabic language classes. She thought they were

biased because of her Western upbringing. They knew she had grown up in the U.S. and had no Saudi educational background. During the interview, they asked her about specific Arabic religious terminologies that she was not aware of and could not answer satisfactorily.

After this, Hala did her GRE and got accepted into a master's program at a Midwestern university. She had no governmental source of financial support at that time. Her father and husband paid for her education in U.S. and took care of her financial needs. She prepared most of her paperwork by herself and did not ask anyone for help. The only time she asked for help was when she needed her father to process her documents at the Ministry of Education. Her husband could not accompany her to the U.S. as he had a business to take care of in Saudi Arabia. It was decided that her husband would visit them every couple of months.

She left for the U.S. along with the kids. Hala felt happy. She had fond memories of her childhood in the US. She felt her social and personal life was controlled by the cultural norms. She felt independent in the US. Her happiness increased when she finally got her driving license as she thought it was the missing link in her feeling independent. At her university, Hala attended an orientation program but did not find it beneficial as she thought she already knew all the information they were providing about life in the US. She had good professors who were supportive but she thought she faced some discriminatory behavior from her cohort who thought she was a rich Saudi lady who did not care much about education and was only here to enjoy the luxuries of life, which was not true.

The transition of moving to the U.S. was not easy. In the US, she had to assume a more responsible role as she had to pay the bills, do the groceries etc. - things she was not responsible for in Saudi. She had become a person on whom the whole family depended – a role she had never assumed before. Similarly, bringing up the kids without the help of their father was also a

challenge since her son was particularly fond of having his father's company. But the one thing that was happy for was that she was already familiar with the U.S. culture and had grown up there. With that knowledge, she managed to cope with the challenges. After spending four months in the US, she finally got the KASP scholarship and soon after got a job at a Saudi university and transferred her sponsorship to the university. Her financial situation improved.

After completing her master's degree, Hala enrolled in a doctoral program at the same university. By this time, the nanny who used to look after her kids, had left. It was a difficult time for her. She thought she struggled on a daily basis looking after her kids and her studies. Her husband visited them regularly but his visits were always short as he had to look after his business in Saudi Arabia. Sometimes, she got fed up and wanted to give up on her studies but she got relaxed when she discussed her issue with her father.

About her experience of living in the US, Hala thought that having both the U.S. and Saudi roots had both advantages and disadvantages. For example, knowing both the cultures was advantageous but sometimes, it made her feel like she was neither completely Saudi nor totally American. She thought, eventually, she would go back to Saudi to impart education to other people. She was not worried about the move as she thought Saudi society had changed a lot and opened to the outside world. She thought apart from the Region of origin, family values also played a key role in the overall experience of a female student as families which were more supportive of female education were a big source of support for them.

The previous sections included a summarized description of each of the participants' identities and a summary of their responses to questions about their adjustment at a U.S. Midwestern university. The following chapter highlighted the themes and important findings

gathered from analyzing the participants' responses in relation to the study's main research questions about the acculturation experience of Saudi female graduates studying in the U.S.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presented the main findings of the study. The first section of this chapter presents the findings that resulted from analyzing the participants' responses to the interview questions. The study's research questions were used to organize the presentations of the results. Two important facts should be noted. One fact to take into consideration while reading the results is that although all participants at the time the study took place were students in their doctoral program, for some participants, their U.S. study abroad experiences started with obtaining their Master's degree, while others directly started their study abroad experience with their Ph.D. program. To identify the important findings related to the participant's acculturation experience, the researcher analyzed the participant's adjustment experiences in the U.S.

Another essential fact to clarify is the presence of overlapping findings in the categorization of the results. Findings from the responses from the 13 participants could not always be classified neatly into single categories, and in several instances, they fell across several categories. After reporting the results, the following section described the utility of the main conceptual frameworks (Hofstede's National Cultural Model and Berry's Acculturation Model) in analyzing the data and presenting the results. Finally, the chapter ends with a section on the study's findings. Moving on to the research questions, the following section presents the main themes taken from the findings that were extracted from the interview responses of the participants.

1-What were the biggest barriers and support factors associated with successful acculturation of Saudi Women? How did the barriers or supportive factors differ for Saudi women from different parts of Saudi (if all)?

2-What strategies were most successful in helping Saudi women adjust to studying in the United States?

3-What institutional characteristics (external) or individual characteristics (internal) were related to helping Saudi Women adjust?

### **Research Question 1**

What were the biggest barriers and support factors associated with successful acculturation of Saudi Women? How did the barriers or supportive factors differ for Saudi women from different parts of Saudi (if all)?

It was apparent from the participants' interviews that their acculturation experiences indicated different factors that had different effects on their adjustment. The participants started their academic journey in Saudi, and at the time the data was collected, they were in the U.S. working on gaining their doctoral degree. Although the participants reported a variety of different factors, three major factors had a high impact on the participants' experiences; the participants' educational backgrounds, their English language skills and the presence of dependents. The three findings were marked as important due to their repetition in the data and their substantial reported effect on the participant's adjustment process.

**1- Educational background.** The majority of the participants all shared different levels of dissatisfaction with their undergraduate learning and teaching system. The participants felt their academic background to be insufficient. Finding themselves not prepared academically for the U.S. educational system served as a barrier in their adjustment. The participants noted that



they had to read and work more than what they were required to because they did not consider themselves academic equals with their cohort. In regards to their educational background, participants talked about the lack of updated professional teaching methods. Teachers used rote learning techniques, Hind (participant 6) reported that in her undergraduate classes "most of the time our grades were fully based on a final exam." In addition to the repeatedly reported teacher-centered classrooms, participants talked about the impact of absent student engagement, specifically within the classrooms. Teaching focused on the delivery of academic content during class, this led to the lack of inquiry opportunities and challenged the development of critical and independent thinking skills. Hind reported how "The teacher would come in and read from a book. The only time she engaged with U.S. was when she was taking attendance." Ten participants mentioned the negative influence of outdated curricula and lack of modern teaching methods on their adjustment. Hala (participant 13) reported her frustration with the outdated teaching method in her program "we never used a computer even though it was 2007!"

Three participants; Nermin (participant 9), Maya (participant 10) and Kinzy (participant 12), considered their background education a supportive factor in their adjustment. They were prepared to receive the new knowledge because of their solid academic background knowledge. Their confidence in class helped them adjust to their academic environments. However, although there were different satisfaction levels with background knowledge, all participants agreed that the absence of research experiences in their Saudi classrooms resulted in the lack of adequate research skills required at their U.S. program. According to Hofstede's Model of National Culture, the absence of research work from the educational system is linked to the Saudi culture's high score on the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension exhibiting a low tolerance for ambiguity. This discussion is expanded further at the end of Chapter 5.

**2- English language skills.** The data showed that the presence of developed English language skills for effective communication was an impactful factor that affected the adjustment of all the participants. Even though all participants had some language learning experience, their language skill levels were different. Two participants had strong developed English language skills. Dalia (participant 2) and Hala (participant 13) both lived in the U.S. for repeated long periods. Their adjustment experience had no challenges associated with verbal communication leading to the finding that their ability to communicate supported their adjustment. The 11 other participants faced different challenges due to their inadequate language skills. Not being able to communicate well enough was a factor that caused stress during their adjustment experience.

The 11 participants varied in their proficiency level. Three participants reported they had no basic language skills before they arrived at the U.S. The three participants said they felt stressed because they had to depend on others to communicate. Siba (participant 5) waited for her husband to return home to go out for simple errands. When they did go out, her husband had to translate for her. She expressed her discomfort with her new surrounding and felt her inability to communicate a barrier. Siba described her first few months "my husband always had to be with me. He translated everything for me, even restaurant menus. I had to wait for him to come home if I needed to go out. I didn't like that I couldn't go out on my own" Other participants felt that the presence of an accent, lack of vocabulary and lack of grammar skills contributed towards their low level of confidence and lack of motivation to engage with others. Sahar (participant 7) expressed that her fear of miscommunication reduced her ability to engage in class. Sahar talked about her preference to be quiet in class "I always paused midsentence because I couldn't remember the appropriate English word and, therefore, I felt I was delivering disconnected information. I was so embarrassed that I avoided talking to people in my class."

Sahar, Siba, and Nada (participants 5, 7 and 8) isolated themselves from engaging with members of their home and host culture because of their undeveloped language skills. Although they wanted to practice speaking in the host language, they could not. Disengaging was a strategy they used to adjust; it fell under the acculturation mode: Separation. Sahar (participant 7) found her low level of language skills a barrier to learn from and engage with members of her host society "I don't have friends yet, I really want to, but I'm still not confident enough to approach others." Participants also reported that their low level of language skills affected their adjustment in their academic environment. To gain admission into her doctoral program, Sahar's was required to reach specific standardized test scores. Her sponsorship program provided her with a limited timeline to get into a doctoral program. She was depressed with her language level and felt pressured to improve her skills within the given timeline. She described her time before she started her program, "my language did not help me, it was a large challenge with the GRE and TOEFL, I come from a background where I have little basic English. I studied every day and kept taking the tests. I even had to ask for a six months' sponsorship extension because I didn't reach the required score within the initial time I had. It was hard."

Siba (participant 5) also talked about her experience in the program, "I focused my research on Arabic text because I was too afraid that I wouldn't be able to use the English resources." Although the participants agreed that the language teaching program in the Saudi public-school system was inefficient, they believed that the main cause behind their undeveloped language skills was the lack of motivation to practice using the language skills beyond classroom walls. The participants reported better experiences as they developed their language skills. They communicated their needs independently and engaged with others in the host culture. This finding agrees with the evidence in the literature that proficient language skills affect the

acculturation of the study abroad student. The data related to the effect of developed language skills on adjustment experience indicated that for female doctoral students in the U.S., strong English language skills serve as an essential supportive factor in the adjustment experience.

**3- Presence of dependents.** All participants had dependents. The effect of their presence differed as a supportive or challenging factor in the participant's adjustment. Data from the interviews showed that four participants found the presence of their dependents supported their adjustment and nine participants felt the presence of their dependents were barriers in their adjustment process. Dependents were relatives of the participants, and they varied in the amount of time they spent with the participant. Some participants had more than one dependent; 11 of the participants had husbands, nine had children, three had brothers, one had a sister, and two participants had their mothers as dependents. Only seven dependents lived continuously with the participants during their time in the U.S.

Nermin's (participant 9) brother accompanied her during her first few months in the U.S. Although she said he wasn't helpful to her adjustment process, his presence was essential to her mother. Her mother was worried that on her own, Nermin would face challenges that she couldn't handle in her new environment. However, Nermin's brother had a difficult time adjusting to his new surrounding "after my brother left, I felt better because I didn't have to worry about him anymore." Areen (participant 3) also felt the same, after her mother and brother left she felt relieved, "although my mother helped me a lot in my adjustment, I convinced her to go back home, I was always worried about her safety and health. It was additional pressure for me."

Despite the reported findings in the literature indicating the presence of children as an additional responsibility and a challenge for mothers that were also students, the study reported

an interesting finding that contradicts the literature. Nine participants indicated that the presence of their children was a positive factor in their adjustment. The mothers said they felt resilient because of their children presence and because of their children they had the motivation to overcome challenges. Hind (participant 6) faced many challenges during her time in the U.S. and said she faced so many challenges since she arrived at the U.S. that she thought about stopping her academic work. However, her desire to overcome barriers and continue her pursuit of a doctoral degree came with the birth of her daughter, "having my daughter helped me change. It made me stronger. I wanted to be her role model. I don't want her to break or feel devastated if she faces a challenging situation. I want her to stand up for herself."

Nermin (participant 9) explained the reason behind the strength of women with children, "women with families adjust better than single women. Mothers understand their responsibility to do what is needed for the sake of their family. Hesitation is not an option." Kinzy (participant 12) explained how her husband's absence helped her become a better mother and motivated her to focus on achieving her goal, "My husband and I endured so many challenges to reach our goal to graduate with high degrees. Although we live in different cities and I take care of the kids on my own, I organize my whole day to make sure every minute is used wisely."

The presence of a close and caring family environment was reported by Sahar (participant 7) as a supportive factor. After she started her classes, Sahar pulled back from socializing with members of the host society to spend time with her children. As a result, Sahar observed that living abroad had brought her family closer, "although I don't have time to socialize like I want to, I don't feel I need to. I have my close family far away from any social distractions. Living abroad had allowed U.S. to connect more because we spend more time with each other. "

Ten participants were married when they arrived at the U.S. Three of the married participants observed that their husbands adopted roles different than the prescribed home culture gender role. The participants reported that their husbands acknowledged the amount of pressure their spouses had as the reason behind their husbands' lesser adherence to the traditional gender roles. For these participants, their husbands were a supportive factor because they shared household responsibilities. The notion to not follow the prescribed gender role relieved the participants of the stress related to cultural norms and expectations.

The experience was different for seven married participants. Cultural expectations related to prescribed home culture gender roles resulted in a daily busy and full schedule for the participants. Other reported experiences revealed different challenges associated with the presence of husbands as dependents. Hind (participant 6) identified her husband's indifference to her difficult experiences a barrier to her adjustment. Hind talked about her husband's response when she reached out asking for his support, "he told me that I was exaggerating and that he was also an international student and he never had problems. I felt alone and misunderstood. I felt that my enthusiasm and excitement to study was gone." Dana (participant 1) felt that her husband's lack of previous travel experience challenged his adjustment and she worried about him, "I wanted him to feel comfortable. I was doing really well with my classes, but he seemed to be struggling with learning the language and living in a foreign environment."

In summary, the majority of participants indicated their dependents' presence as a supportive factor. Participants that reported their dependents as barriers noted their challenges associated with adhering to home culture norms. Interestingly, results related to children of the participants do not support previous related research. In contrast with what the literature in chapter 3 reported, the study revealed the presence of children as a supportive factor. This

section presented the three-main supportive and challenging factors reported by the participants to affect their adjustment experience. The following section reported results related to the strategies used during the participant's adjustment experience.

## **Research Question 2**

What strategies were most successful in helping Saudi women adjust to studying in the United States?

The interviews confirmed two strategies used most often by the participants to help with their adjustment experience. The two strategies identified from the data analysis were: (1) reaching out for support and (2) effectively seeking to create social relationships.

**1- Reaching out.** Analysis of the data that described the experiences of participants who reached out for and accepted support highlighted three distinct themes. The main themes were navigation resources in the home culture, family support, and campus support.

*a. Early navigation of existing resources.* Out of the 13 participants, nine participants actively sought different resources to navigate their host environment before they came to the U.S. The interviews revealed two main resources repeatedly used by the participants. One frequently sought resource was seeking information from work colleagues and family members who studied or lived abroad. The participants' experiences with their resources revealed an interesting finding. Participants that received information from work colleagues reported that the information helped with their adjustment experience in the U.S. However, the information that came from family members were not reported to be an effective resource. Nermin (participant 9) benefited from her friend at work, “my colleague who was from the U.S. was helpful, she helped me choose universities in cities where she knew I would feel more comfortable.” The cause of this difference was clarified when Dalia's (participant 2) explained her decision not to use her

family's experience living abroad as a resource. She explained, "I didn't ask for their help because I did not expect their knowledge to be current and helpful." The fact that most of the family members that lived abroad were parents or older extended family members that gained their degree when the participants were young emphasizes Dalia's observation.

Another resource used by seven participants described the internet as a vast and accessible resource. The online resources varied from formal institutional websites to social media platforms. Participants that sourced the internet felt prepared and confident they had a realistic expectation about their host community. Participants found the previous experiences of other Saudi students shared on social media served as a supportive factor in their adjustment, Areen (participant 3) said: "I preferred to get the information I needed from the latest updated discussions on social media chat platform built for Saudi students living in the U.S." Participants also sourced Google Maps to "see" their host environment through satellite images. Participants said they felt safe in their new host culture because they were familiar with images of the environment. Kinzy (participant 12) described her first moments walking around her new neighborhood, "I was happy walking in the area we chose to live in and even recognized the streets we visited because I used Google Map and saw everything before I came. My husband was surprised and told me that it was like I lived here before." One participant said they gained a sense of independence when they navigated online resources, Dalia (participant 2) described her independence as a strength, "I did everything on my own. I could read and understand everything. The websites were clear and informative." Although Yara (participant 4) confirmed the internet resource as a positive strategy, she pointed out a challenge she faced, "I couldn't trust some websites because I found that their web pages were not updated frequently." She addressed



this challenge when she asked for confirmation, "I checked the validity of information on university websites by sending emails to their administration."

Participants that navigated online resources noted that they were prepared for the living and studying abroad experience. They reported a continued use of the internet as a resource even after they arrived at the U.S. They sought information that addressed issues related to their adjustment experiences. Nermin (participant 9) found the U.S. online resources easy to use, "everything in the U.S. is organized and clear, I can find the forms and steps for everything online. I can do everything myself."

*b. Family support.* Nine participants used the strategy to request and accept family support to support their adjustment. The participants' experiences revealed the family resource supported their physical, financial and emotional needs. Dalia (participant 2) was happy with the financial assistance she received from her family. She described the support helpful in her adjustment, "When my father-in-law bought me my car, I finally could go to the supermarket and buy whatever I needed, I didn't have to worry about carrying everything on the bus." Participants described family support helpful for their adjustment experience. For newly married Maya (participant 10), the presence of her parents and siblings was important in her adjustment, "my family came in a few months after I moved to the U.S. They stayed for three months. Knowing that I would find my mother had a meal ready after class and that my brothers were home made me happy. I began to feel more comfortable with my new city because of my family's presence." Yara's (participant 4) mother helped her develop skills that allowed her to live an independent life in the U.S. Yara highlighted some examples of her mother's support, "my mother stayed with me for six months. Within that time, she helped me furnish the apartment and taught me how to drive a car. It was a nice feeling to have her; it was like we were two independent women living

on our own. I learned so much from my mom on how to be self-sufficient. It helped me so much to know how to provide for myself." The presence of family also allowed for identifying the physical support of helping with the participants' children. For a short period, children of five participants lived with the participants' parents in Saudi. Dana (participant 1) views her mother's support as essential to her adjustment experience. She described her gratitude and peace of mind, "my mother is a blessing. I miss my daughter, but I know she is with someone I trust and understands my need to focus and study well."

Participants that did not reach out and accept family support viewed receiving family support a form of dependence. Their independence from the family was proof of maturity and capability of handling issues alone. The goal to remain independent affected the participant's decision to respond to their need for emotional support. For Yara (participant 4), seeking emotional support from the family was a difficult decision to make, "I never wanted to depend on anyone because I don't want my family to think I couldn't manage myself. I did, however, allow myself to be supported by my sisters who also studied abroad. They also don't want to worry our family back home. I'm glad I can talk to them when I need to. People alone could face moments of weakness that lead to giving up. It is important to have people you trust to remove your doubts."

Nermin (participant 9), didn't reach out for family emotional support because she wanted to avoid adverse reactions like excessive worry or overburdening her mother, "my mother worries too much, I don't want to call her and cause her more worry."

In summary, although nine participants reached out and benefited from their family's support during their adjustment experience, a small number of participants avoided the family support to maintain independence.

*c. Campus support.* Eight participants benefited from the different support services on their campus. When Hind (participant 6) started to attend conferences in her field, she found herself relating to the gender-related challenges discussed in several sessions. She attended similar sessions at her university that were helpful to her adjustment, "I found out by accident that there was a "women in science" club. I thought I was alone in my struggle in my department. They helped me build my confidence to face the challenges." Although participants utilized campus support programs as a strategy to support their adjustment, most participants used only the services they were told they needed. Siba's (participant 5) professor told her to make an appointment at the writing center and show them her paper, "I went to the writing center and showed them my work. They fixed my work and even helped me learn important research skills." Participants observed that the benefits of some campus services expanded beyond their specific purpose. For the participant Dalia (participant 2), she found that the student support services exceeded her expectations. Although she had strongly developed language skills, she attended a language learning program for legality purposes. She found that the program's support services covered all the needs of international students. Dalia talked about how her positive experience at the program supported her adjustment process, "The language center is the best place to learn about the expectations of the U.S. educational system. I didn't even know the word plagiarism existed."

The majority of participants reported positive experiences that resulted from using the strategy of seeking resources. Resources varied between family members, co-workers, online information, and campus services. Participants that did not seek resources in any of those areas stressed the importance of maintaining their independence and avoid the state of dependency that came with accepting support.

**2- Seeking social relationships.** Less than half of the participants reported seeking social relationships and befriending different people from the host society. Participants created social relationships with other international students, Muslim members of the host society and Saudi women who lived in the host society.

*a. Relationships with other international students.* Six of the 13 participants reached out and made friends with people from other nationalities. They reported that their friendship experiences supported their adjustment process. Sahar (participant 7) said that she befriended people with different point of views and perceived her experience essential to her adjustment in the host society, "I really wanted to make friends in the U.S., I wanted to increase my knowledge of the world." Dalia (participant 2) found comfort in creating relationships with other international students that shared her needs, "I didn't want to engage with people from my society, most of the women were not even students, they didn't even speak English." Dalia found a supportive circle of friends within the international student society, "We were a group made up of Indians, South Americans, and Arab students. Our cultures were similar, and we got along well. We valued social relationships and understood the importance of generosity and sharing in those relationships." Nora (participant 11) also agreed with Dalia and noted that she felt more comfortable engaging with students from different nations than her own, "I only had international student friends, we were together all the time, we all had the same interests and goals."

Participants with children who attended school noted that their children's' friendships were a resource for seeking relationships with foreigners. Maya (participant 10) talked about her friends, "after my daughter went to daycare, I got to know other parents that came from different parts of the world. I connected with two mothers that were also students at the university. One

mother was from Spain, and the other was from Taiwan. Our daughters' strong friendship brought us together as friends."

***b. Relationships with Muslim members of the host culture.*** Three participants indicated that their social relationship with other Muslims helped their adjustment experience. Participants explained that their desire to learn about the differences that existed in their host society was one reason behind seeking the social relationship. Dana (participant 1) attended the social gatherings of the Islamic community to meet other Muslim women, "I loved that I had social relationships with the Muslim women at the mosque because I loved to see the differences. They were from all over the world; I learned so much from them about the beauty of Islam, things I didn't realize before." An interesting finding that came from the interviews is that the participants realized that their relationship with the Muslim women resulted in a repeated presence at the mosque. Participants observed they developed a strong faith that helped them in their adjustment. Participants said their faith was a spiritual assurance that gave them a sense of security. Security was a supportive factor for their adjustment process that resulted from their social relationships with Muslims. Hind (participant 6) talked about the strength and confidence she found through her relationship with the Muslim women at the mosque, "I feel that I have stronger faith than what I had when I was back home. It reassured me that Allah would help me resolve the challenges. I prefer to talk with the ladies at the mosque; they make me feel calm."

***c. Relationships with Saudis in the host society.*** Three participants reported their social relationships with Saudi women an important part of their adjustment. Participants cited the shared home culture as a source of understanding they valued in their relationship with the Saudi women. Kinzy (participant 12) discovered that her friendship experience with the Saudi women provided her with a better adjustment experience than her social relationships with non-Saudis,

"in the end, it was the Saudi women whom I found myself to be comfortable with, they helped me because they understood my challenges."

In summary, fewer participants emphasized the positive effect of the seeking relationships strategy in comparison with the majority of participants that reported the positive impact of the seeking resources strategy. However, it is important to note that the use of both strategies resulted in positive experiences that supported their adjustment experience.

### **Research Question 3**

What institutional characteristics (external) or individual characteristics (internal) were related to helping Saudi Women adjust?

#### **1- Individual student characteristics**

*a. Previous travel to Western countries.* One of the most effective characteristics reported by the participants to support their adjustment in their host society was the experience of having traveled to Western countries. Eight Participants with previous touristic travel or living abroad experience in Western countries noted that their experience helped them avoid some of the challenges that were reported by the other participants. The previous travel to Western countries allowed the participants to gain skills and experiences that supported their adjustment experience. The data indicated a cause and effect relationship between the presence of a prior travel experience to Western countries and the positive adjustment experience reported by the participants. Participants that went on vacations abroad with their families noted that they were aware of the differences between the Western culture and their own home culture. Maya (participant 10) had a realistic expectation about the clothes she needed. She was not worried about her travel preparations, "I wasn't worried about packing, we always traveled to the U.S. and Europe. I already had headscarves." In contrast to Maya's experience, participants who either

never traveled abroad or only visited other Arabic speaking countries in the Middle East reported they went through a culture shock that challenged their adjustment process. Hind (participant 6) said she didn't know how to prepare for her travel, "We never traveled anywhere, I didn't know how to prepare myself or what clothes to buy." Nora (participant 11) felt inadequate and unprepared for her host community, "I got off the plane wearing my most expensive and fancy clothes, everyone was wearing jeans, I felt embarrassed."

Dalia (participant 2) spent several of her childhood summers in the U.S. because of that when she arrived at the U.S. to pursue her doctoral program she did not feel like a foreigner. She was comfortable and familiar with her host society, "both my parents and most of my family members had postgraduate degrees from U.S. universities. It was natural for me to choose a U.S. university because it was a familiar place for my family to gain an education." Hala (participant 13) returned to the U.S. town where she grew up, "I grew up in the U.S. I always knew I wanted to come back and study in the same place where I lived with my parents. I recognized the streets and places. It was easy for me to fit in with the host culture."

***b. Home cultural and societal support.*** Hofstede described the behavior of the Saudi culture as a collectivist culture where members were restricted to follow norms and traditions to maintain their cultural and societal membership (Hofstede, 2003). In a collectivist culture, members support and take care of each other with the condition that members adhere to the cultural norms. All participants confirmed they were aware of the risks associated with their decision to study abroad alone. They said their decision contradicted a cultural rule based on a religious resulted in the participants being shamed and ostracized. The participants' families would not support their study abroad unless the participant was married, specifying the husband as the Mehram. For several participants who intended to study abroad, the presence of the

Mehram/husband created a sense of feasibility that supported their adjustment. In the view of the society, if the student was married then she had followed the societal norms and is loyal to the societal values. The significance of the husband's presence as a mahram and dependent is related to the Saudi cultural characteristics defined by Hofstede's National Culture Model which is discussed further near the end of the chapter. Participants' interview responses revealed a varied level of challenges that stemmed from cultural and societal pressures. Participants that had the support of both their home culture and society reported positive adjustment experience.

Dalia's (participant 2) experience illustrates the relationship between following the norms and receiving cultural and societal support, "after I got my undergraduate degree and before I got married, I applied and got accepted to a U.S. postgraduate program. My family told me that only if I was married would I be able to go."

Participants revealed that despite the presence of societal disapproval that stems from the threat of not adhering to the restrictive norms, participants identified their parent's support the reason behind their ability to live and study in the U.S. on their own. Participants that did not receive their parent's encouragement and support home culture societal support indicated

Yara's (participant 3) father gained his Ph.D. degree in the U.K. He was the first to leave home for a Western country. His parents and extended family members were disappointed with his decision. Empathy from their parents that that came from facing similar challenges Yara's father was encouraging position Yara's father's provided Yara with support, "My father understood the disappointment I felt when my uncles expressed their disapproval to my decision to travel abroad. He also faced the same challenges with the society when he wanted to travel abroad. He supported my decision because he understood how important it was to me."



Another interesting finding in relation to the home and societal support was the effect of the acceptance and blessing of extended family. For four of the participants, approval of the extended family was important and served as a positive factor in their adjustment process. Because the Saudi culture is characterized to be high in Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance cultural dimension, participants used a gradual process method to gain their families acceptance. The dimensions are explored further at the end of the chapter. One participant described her in-law's refusal to the idea of leaving the city. Because home cultural and societal acceptance is essential in a collectivist society, it is not surprising that this would affect the participant's family decisions. "My husband was careful when informing his family of the move. During our year of planning – he started by telling them that they were thinking of moving to a nearby city and eventually after several months, he told them about the U. S., the idea was not so foreign to them because of the gradual steps he took to inform them."

The gradual process also served one participant's experience to gain the blessings of her mother, "after I got my BA, I lived and worked in a different city than my family. Initially, the separation was hard for my mother, but it became normal after a while. The experience helped my mother accept my decision to move farther to the U.S."

The nature of the participant's home's culture was important to the adjustment of the student. Six participants were influenced by the presence of strong family female role models. One of the participants commented that her mother and her grandmother were strong and responsible women in their household. They were the main decision-makers in their families. Assuming the role of a strong, responsible, decision-maker was not difficult for her and helped her to overcome challenges she faced during her adjustment experience, "my mother and her

mother were the ones who took all the responsibility in the family. It was easy for me to follow that role."

Two participants who had mothers with a different nationality, found they benefited from their mothers' experiences of living in a foreign country. Both participants described their mothers to be strong and patient women. Both participants looked up to their mothers as role models to follow when faced with challenges during their study abroad experience.

In summary, having a strong mother helped. However, not all women reported the presence of strong female members in their family. One participant stated, "I don't consult my mother when I face difficult situations, she is sensitive and does not handle foreign issues well. I depend on myself to figure things out."

**c. Work experience.** For eight participants, their previous work experience allowed them knowledge and ability gained from understanding bureaucratic organizations and how they operate. From their work experience, participants reported gaining technical, communication, organization and planning, problem solving skills that supported their adjustment experience. One participant expressed her ability to handle the study abroad challenges because of her previous job responsibilities, "I arrived alone in a city I was never in before, but I was not scared, I knew how to manage myself. I successfully managed a whole bank branch administration back home, the branch was recognized many times for its outstanding performance." The study found that seven participants reported better adjustment experience due to their technical skills allowing them to locate resources that were best fit for their needs. Kinzy reported helping many students find resources to serve their needs "we take our knowledge of certain skills for granted, many students I helped don't know how to use google."

Dalia's (participant 2) insured she completed all the steps for her legal papers process by communicating with both the Saudi U.S. embassy and the Saudi Cultural Mission Office. She confirmed she did all the required steps by finally checking their official websites. For Nora (participant 11) her work experience gave her the knowledge of sources important to her academic field. She also had a general understanding of the important regulations she needed to address because she sometimes helped her students prepare for the study abroad experience, "I figured out when to apply to the university I wanted and what to expect from the U.S. academic system."

Kinzy's (participant 12) expertise with technology helped her find a safe place for her family to live in before she arrived in the U.S. She also equipped herself with information of unsafe places she needed to avoid in her new host city. According to her, "I did so much research on my new city, I familiarized myself with the safe places to live and visit. Doing the search was my way to make me and my family feel comfortable. I remember that after we arrived in Chicago I suggested places to my husband that he had never heard about before. I was happy that I was already familiar with my new environment."

Findings from participants that had no work experiences provided strong evidence that skills gained from work experience were a strong supportive factor in the adjustment experience. Hind (participant 6) and Dana (participant 1) both felt discouraged that they did not know enough about their new environment that could help them with their adjustment. Dana suffered financially by depending on the advice of her husband's friends. After she learned research skills from her M.A. experience, she was determined to use her skills to help her adjust in her new city where she was going to gain her doctoral degree. She expressed her disappointment with her earlier experiences, "After several disappointing experiences, we learned from our mistakes and

realized we didn't know or recognize our abilities, we could've had better information ourselves. If we tried and searched ourselves, I already knew the language, I could've used Google or online search but I didn't know that I could do that."

## **2- Institutional characteristics**

*a. Initial arrival support.* Among the different formal organizations, the participants initially interacted with, the majority of the participants reported the international student support programs to be the most beneficial to their adjustment process.

All participants reported an instance of interaction with the Saudi Cultural Mission Office (SACM) in Washington. The goal of the mandatory initial visit to SACM for all the participants was to insure a student file was opened and that all legal forms were in order. Participants were not aware that SACM information sessions existed. However, during her SACM visit, one participant informally heard that there was an ongoing optional session. She attended but was not happy with the presenter's tips on living in the U.S., "I was upset with the presenter's lack of professional manner. I remember the presenter told the students: just because people smile at you on the street does not mean that they are your friends. He was sarcastic and not welcoming at all. He didn't have to say that." Beyond the initial visit, the participants reported that they did not have much contact with any of the Saudi sponsorship organizations. One participant was happy that she didn't need to contact them after their system update. She said "all the permission requests and operations were digitalized, so, I don't need to contact them anymore, miscommunication usually happened over the phone and it was far away to travel to." four of the participants were disappointed with lack of engagement from the sponsorship organizations, they expected more support. One student talked about the negative effects of their absence, "I was sad that I didn't receive any supporting emails. I didn't feel important to them; they didn't make any

efforts to pay attention to my needs. It is important they connect with students, especially the female students. I feel that their absence as a guide is the main reason behind many of the problems I face as a Saudi female student."

All participants reported the international student services as the second important formal organization to visit. The participants reported that although an information session or orientation was provided, like SACM, the main goal was to insure all legal documents were in order and complete. Out of the 13 participants, only four found the orientation offered by the international student services beneficial to their adjustment. However, all the participants agreed that during their doctoral program they found the international student advisor assigned to the Saudi students helpful to their adjustment. Yara's experience with the international student services was positive, "the international student service staff were helpful in making sure my student legal status papers were complete. There was a specific advisor for the Saudi students and he had great background knowledge of how the Saudi educational system worked. He also had great network within SACM, this helped make sure both organizations were in sync when it came to issues related to my status. He was always helpful and always quick to respond to my emails."

All but two participants spent some time at an English language learning program. Five participants attended different private programs in different cities and the other five attended a language program associated with the university. From the participants that attended the same program, two participants reported their dissatisfaction with the program's environment. They felt the program's restrictive environment was not welcoming and did not provide a positive impression for students who started their study abroad experience learning the language. One participant described the atmosphere, "they treated me like a school student. My program

entrance standardized exams were held on weekdays, but they didn't accept that as a valid reason to leave class. They marked me absent and said I didn't care about my learning."

On the other hand, two participants that attended private programs emphasized the importance of attending a language learning program. The program staff was engaging, and the services addressed the participants' academic and social needs. One student reported that she felt she was taken care of when she saw reminder emails related to insuring their legal status. One student relates the success of the program to the programs long experience dealing with Saudi students, "my time at the institute was beneficial and the staff was supportive. I think that because most of the students that attended the program were from Saudi, the staff was knowledgeable of my needs and was helpful."

Although, the results indicated mixed views and experiences with the formal organizations they initially met and the organizations' initial arrival support services and programs. All the participants agreed that the presence of services related to insuring their legal status proved to be a positive, supportive factor in their adjustment experience.

***b. Departmental support.*** Different members of an academic department illustrated a factor that affected the students' adjustment within their academic area in relation to the institution.

*Staff support.* "My department orientation was more beneficial to me than the one I had through the international student services. I already knew everything because I did an online search before I came. The department told me how their academic system worked"

*Cohort members support.* Although the majority of the participants reported socializing with members outside their classrooms, a few participants reported on cohort support that affected their adjustment. When Dana (participant 1) started her Master's program classes, she

felt overwhelmed with the expectations of her U.S. classes, and she felt confused and a student from her class reached out to help her, "she approached me after class on day. She offered to help me with my notes, after that we always got together, she always invited me to her house. I learned many research and social skills from her. She was caring, I will never forget her."

Another participant found her cohort to be considerate and kind. When they found out she was fasting, "some of them came to hold my bag because they thought I must be tired and with no energy. Other students were considerate, they never drank in front of me even if it was outside the classroom."

However, contradicting the supportive nature of the cohort in the previous experiences, 1 participant found her cohort to be difficult, "my cohort members never talked to me. In the beginning, I felt that my purple abaya (long cloak) was stopping them, but nothing changed after I took it off. Once I got excited when someone asked me where I was from, but when I told him, he told me that the Saudi society was rich and oppressive. I just walked away; I didn't know what to say."

*Professor support.* The findings show that professors that displayed intercultural awareness, acceptance of diverse views and were proactive in approaching students in need were a supportive factor in the adjustment process of the participant. Although the reported experiences of the participants included both positive and negative experiences with different professors, this section presented the experiences the participants reported to affect their adjustment experience. Nine participants reported that an open, communicative relationship with their professors resulted in experiencing less acculturative stress because they felt they were acknowledged and understood. Dana (participant 1) recalls one of her first experiences with her professor, "I remember my M.A. academic advisor. I still have the paper that he wrote for me to

explain and clarify the all the degree requirements. He was helpful, and that was the first time he met me!" Nermin (participant 9) was surprised with her professor's religious awareness, "I found wonderful kindness and understanding in my classes. During Ramadan, my teacher informed the class that I was fasting and asked them to refrain from eating in class."

Maya (participant 10) talked about her positive experience with her professors. She found their reaching out and engaging with the students an effective characteristic of the U.S. academic culture. She described her professors' engagement efforts, "I appreciate how my professors helped me move forward from the place I was, in the beginning, they were always approachable and welcoming. In class, they gave me the knowledge and skills they knew I needed. They also broke a cultural barrier when they invited my husband and me to their Thanksgiving dinner."

On the other hand, five of the students reported contradicting experiences with their professors that caused them stress. The participants reported on challenging experiences where their professor's treatment served as a barrier to their adjustment. Hind's (participant 6) experience with her professors and department, in general, had a challenging effect on most of her adjustment experience. As she excitedly entered her department, wearing in her purple abaya and scarf, she described her professor and cohort's initial response as unwelcoming. She felt avoided and that her presence was intentionally ignored. The professor never had time for her when she approached them after class. Hind reported many examples where she felt her professors' behaviors were challenging, "during a research project work, I received harsh emails from my professor where all members of the group were copied. 'I don't think you will finish your work. Your progress is below average.' Another example was during her comprehensive exam where one of the professors on the committee laughed at her pronunciation." Her following strong words described her discouragement, "I lost my passion for science." Overall, these



contradictory views on the effect of the role of the professor indicate its importance on the student's adjustment experience.

### Utility of Theoretical Models

According to Berry's Model (1997), acculturation modes are defined by choices made regarding two important aspects: how much was the home culture maintained and how much engagement was made with the host culture. Taking into consideration the choices made by the participants within the two aspects, the data from the participant's responses were used to detect the two measurements for each participant. The analysis focused on the extent the participants valued and maintained their home cultural identity and the extent they valued engaging with members of the host society.

The study revealed that although some participants choice of acculturation mode was observed, seven of the participants were in different modes during different stages of the adjustment experience. Table 2 presented the different acculturation modes of the participants during their study abroad experience. As a result, the numbers in the table do not add up to only 13 women. In table 2, (X) is a symbol for a participant with an adjustment experience that indicated the presence of only one acculturation mode and (O) is a symbol of a participant that experienced more than one acculturation mode.

Table 2 – Berry's Acculturation Modes of the Participants

Acculturation Mode	Modest Evidence	Moderate Evidence	Strong Evidence
Assimilate			XXX
Integrate		XX O	XXX O
Separate	X O		XX
Marginalize	XO		XX OOO

Data from the participants' interviews were used to identify the participants' acculturation modes. Students that assimilated as a form of acculturation reported adjustment experiences defined by their keen choice to engage with members of the host community. It was also defined by experiences that indicate the participants' choice to adopt values of their host culture and discontinue upholding values of the home culture. From the moment Nora (participant 11) arrived in the U.S., she found fitting in her new environment challenging, "It took time to learn how to dress comfortably like how everyone else dresses, but I learned. I finally went out in my Pajama once!" Halla (Participant 13) acculturation mode was assimilation. She never mentioned her nationality to the parents of her daughter's friends, "I never told them I was Saudi. I wanted my daughter to fit in. I don't want to look Saudi because I don't want to explain myself." Another participant that assimilated was Dalia (participant 2). When Dalia was in her M.A. program, she had no Saudi friends, "I heard that the Saudi girls spread rumors that I was someone that needed to be avoided because I was divorced and alone." Her assimilation proved to be positive for her adjustment as she explains that after she married her American husband, she felt accepted in her new family. "No one judged me or treated me differently in my husband's family."

Some participants found their adjustment experience to be defined by integration. These participants integrated by maintaining values of their home culture and adopting values from the new culture while also actively engaging with members of the host community.

Dana's (Participant 1), integrated mode of acculturation, showed stressed maintaining home values and adopting host culture values, however, her acculturation mode included a slight inclination to show assimilation in relation to her preference in engaging with the host community. While she worked on her M.A., Dana socialized at the mosque. "I loved getting to

know the different Muslim women at the mosque more than spending my time with the Saudi community, it was eye-opening to learn new things about Muslim women."

Sahar (participant 7) also identified with two acculturating modes at once, Sahar's goal was to learn about her new host community. During the study, Sahar's acculturation mode displayed separation. This mode was mainly affected by her choice to separate in relation to her engagement with members of the host community. At this point of her adjustment process, she prefers to engage while being understood, "My English accent isn't good, I don't think I am understood. I really want to make U.S. friends, but I'm embarrassed to even talk in class in front of the other students."

Marginalization is the acculturation mode of the participants that reported intentionally avoiding members from both their home and host culture and showed evidence of not maintaining their home culture values. Areen's experience showed evidence of the Separation mode, "I don't want my parents to be affected by the way I choose to live here. I prefer to stay away from the Saudi gatherings. That way no news of me would reach home." When asked about engaging with others within the institution's department, she preferred to stay away from them, "students at my department are competitive. Students would feel threatened if you get better grades, they will try to make you look and feel bad"

Separation was Nada's (participant 8) initial mode of acculturation. When Nada first arrived in the U.S., she insisted on continuing wearing her Niqab (face cover). However, after the first year in her M.A. program, she had to go through practical training and was required to teach young children, "despite my nervousness, my decision to take off my Niqab (face cover) was not difficult to make, I didn't want the children in class to feel afraid because I looked different." Afterwards, her choices seem to indicate that she moved from maintaining a strong hold on her

home culture values and looked at integration as a mode of acculturation. This move to a different mode was evident when she reported to be surprised to find that she was not recognized in her department, “I waved to my professor as he passed by, but he looked confused and just passed me, he didn’t know who I was!”

The table and the quotes above reveal the acculturation modes of the participants during their study abroad experience in the U.S. Although some participants identified with one single mode of acculturation, there was evidence in the study that some participants moved between modes while others identified with more than one mode at one time. It was interesting to find that participants identified with a single acculturation mode throughout their adjustment experience were mostly from the Central Region. (seven participants from the Central Region and one participant from the Western Region): That is 77% participants of the overall participants from the central region identified with one mode of acculturation. Of related significance was that their acculturation mode was usually one of the two extreme acculturation modes; to marginalize or to assimilate. Most of the participants from the Central region identified with one of two acculturation modes, participants assimilated and fully immersed themselves into the host culture and adopted the host cultures values and beliefs. Other Central region participants marginalized and avoided engaging in any of the two cultures; the home and the host culture. Different reasons may exist as to why this finding was evident in the results, the study used Hofstede’s Model of National Culture to show a possible reason. This is explained in more detail in the next section where we move from Berry’s Model of Acculturation (Berry, 1997) and use the results from the interviews to examine and determine how Hofstede’s model (Hofstede, 2003) are used to explain the adjustment experiences defined by their acculturation modes.

## **The Impact of Regional Culture**

The analysis that used Hofstede's National Cultural Model (Hofstede, 2003) to explain the data organized by Berry's Acculturation Model (Berry, 1997) revealed that the regions that these Saudi women come from had a strong impact on their study abroad experience. As noted in Chapter 2, there were instances in the literature that stated the cultures of the different Saudi regions had an impact on their acculturation. To examine the differences between the participants due to their home regions, Table two organizes and categorizes the results of analyzing the study's data according to the dimensions of Hofstede's Model of National Culture.

Hofstede's Model of National Culture (2003) categorizes countries according to culture's behavioral preferences in relation to six identified dimensions. Culture, as defined by Hofstede, is the programming of the mind that distinguishes groups of people from another. The first of the six dimensions measuring the cultural behaviors and norms is the "Power Distance Index" (PDI) which measures the degree of inequality between members of the culture. High PDI indicates the presence of a strong hierarchal order versus a low PDI indicating the presence of equal distribution of power. The second dimension is IDV or "Individualism Versus Collectivism". Cultures that score high in IDV had Individuals that are loyal towards a group that is expected to look after them in exchange. Cultures with individuals that take care of themselves and immediate family score low in IDV. The third dimension measures the Masculinity versus Femininity or "MAS" looks at achievement, competitiveness, material award versus cooperation and quality of life. Uncertainty Avoidance Index or UAI is the fourth dimension and it measures a cultures strong adherence to rigid values and beliefs versus relaxed principles when it comes to evaluating and accepting new ideas and behaviors. Pragmatic Versus Normative or "PRA" is Hofstede's fifth dimension and it looks at the preference of culture to either a "Long-Term

Orientation” or a “Short Term Normative Orientation”. In this dimension, cultures can score low and honor historical continually followed traditions or score high and act with pragmatism and prepare for to establish a modern future. The last dimension looks at the level of Indulgence in regards to responding to needs and enjoying life versus a culture of Restraint that adheres to strict social norms.

Although research results on the Saudi’s general national culture model exist, literature indicated in Chapter 2 indicates the existence of wide cultural variations between regions. Using Hofstede’s existing results as a guide and data from the participants, Table 3 displays the characteristics of the Central and Western Saudi regions. Since the data came from participants who were from the Central and the Western region, the dimensions in the tables below were used to describe only those two regions of Saudi.

Table 3 – Saudi Central and Western Region using Hofstede’s National Culture Model

Hofstede’s Dimensions	Central Region	Western Region
D1 High/Low Power	High power: presence of hierarchal order and strong influence of head of tribe or head of extended family	Medium Power: strong to medium ties exist between members of the family and society
D2 Individualistic/ Collectivistic	Collectivist: tight loyal relationships between members of the same region	Collectivist: strong evidence on the importance of loyalty to home culture and fear of shame when contradicting social norms
D3 Feminine/Masculine	Masculine: members live to work. Work is dominant over developing caring relationships	Modest evidence on importance of work. Emphasis on care and relationships

D4 Uncertainty Avoidance/Tolerant	High uncertainty avoidance leading to difficulty in accepting new ideas	Low uncertainty avoidance: changes and differences are common and tolerated
D5 Long Term Orientation/Pragmatic	Normative culture defined by respect and adherence to long lasting tribal traditions	Modest presence of long term orientation and following traditions due to growing existence of different cultures.
D6 Indulgent/Restrained	More restrictive than indulgent indicating restrictive social norms	Indulgent, indicating lifestyles more inclined to experience leisure with some evidence of restrictive social norms

The results from Hofstede's (2003) categorization of the regions indicates an interesting finding in relation to Berry's Acculturation Model (Berry, 1997). The categorization showed the culture of the Central region is different in comparison to the U.S. culture. In contrast, the culture of the Saudi Western region is described as tolerant to differences and had a less restrictive social-cultural norm. Description of the Saudi Western region culture had some cultural similarities (in modest amounts) with the U.S. culture. As a result of the differences and similarities, the cultural gap between the Central region and the U.S. host region is considered to be wider than the cultural gap between the Western region and the U.S. host region.

Surprisingly, the predicted amount of supportive or challenging factors affecting the adjustment experience is not consistent with one of the core principles in Berry's Acculturation Model. Berry (1997) identifies the presence of a wide gap between the home and host culture as a major cause of stressors. Data from this study did not offer any supportive evidence serving the significance of this principle. Even though participants that came from the Western Region had a

smaller cultural gap than the participants from the Central region, no one region had challenging stressors more than the other region.

Another finding from using Hofstede's model (Hofstede, 2003) to analyze the data is related to the previous section on Berry's Acculturation Model (Berry, 1997). The comparison between the cultures of the Western and Central region in Table 2 provides an insight into a reason behind the adoption of acculturation modes. The data presented in the previous section showed that participants from the Western Region were more likely to acculturate by separation or more acculturate in different modes in contrast to the majority of the Central region participants who either assimilated or marginalized. The existing wide cultural gap between the Central region and the host society could be the cause of relationship between the extreme modes of acculturation and participants from the Central region. Participants found the U.S. culture as an opportunity to safely fully avoid maintaining values of their home culture without the repercussions of offending their home cultures societal norms. This may be true for the participants that assimilated by opting to avoid maintaining home culture values in exchange for the values and beliefs of the host community. The wide culture gap could also be the reason why other central region participants marginalization and opt to disengage with both cultures of their home and host society. The host society could be seen as a threat to maintaining their home values while the restrictive social norms and values of their home cultures could be seen as a threat to their ability to continue their education abroad. In these cases, marginalization is the best and safest mode to define their adjustment experience.

### **Emergent Findings**

In addition to the findings, there were realizations that the study results did not find in comparison with the issues emphasized in the literature and past studies. The study did not find



the data in agreement with the literature related to Hijab and negative adjustment experiences. The literature showed that in 2008, the American Civil Liberties Union emphasized the dangers of discrimination against women wearing Hijabs in the U.S. (ACLU, 2008). In the study, all but two participants indicated that they wore Hijabs and for a short period, one of the ten participants additionally wore a Niqab (material face cover with opening for eyes). She took it off the face cover voluntarily with no home or host social or cultural pressure. The participants reported experiences with the religious head covering revealed no relationship with their adjustment. The presence of an Islamic head covering or the lack of it were not reported to affect the adjustment experience neither as a challenge or as a supportive factor.

In addition to the absent effect of the Islamic Hijab on the participants, one related point not mentioned in the literature but was mentioned by only one participant was associated with the Abaya. The Abaya is a black cloak-like garment normally worn by females of the Arab Gulf. The participant removed her Abaya after a year because she felt it was separating her from others. "I thought my Abaya (cloak: clothes cover) was the reason behind people avoiding interacting with me. That the abaya caused a boundary between them and me but removing it didn't help, I still felt I was not accepted in my departments' social circles."

Another interesting finding is that the participants did not consider religion as the reason behind being conservative or the reason behind the conservative Saudi culture. They thought being conservative was a characteristic of a collectivist society. The collectivist society, as defined by Hofstede (2003), was a society that stayed close together and followed certain cultural adopted by all members of the group. Hofstede defined the Saudi society to be a collectivist society where members followed societal and cultural norms to stay part of the group. Hence, change and differences were feared in the Saudi culture. The participants

mentioned that there were words used by people in their family, in their social circle or in online social media platforms that describe the negatively viewed Western behaviors picked up by students living in a foreign society. These behaviors were the new ideas that were considered a threat to the cultural norms of the Saudi society. The terms liberal, Westernized and open were some of the words that were used to describe a person who had deviated from the Saudi societal norms. On the other hand, the issue of religion was brought up in the interviews as a positive factor. It was displayed in words like faith and trust in Allah. The girls mentioned how they felt that they were more faithful and religious than when they were in Saudi. Some of them mentioned how in Saudi, faith was evidence of following the social and cultural norms in an avoidance of repercussions like shame resulting from not maintaining the culture's values and beliefs.

Chapter 5 identified factors found from the data, which affected the acculturation process of the Saudi female doctoral students interviewed in the study. Using responses from the interviews, the data showed that the participant's stress effected their satisfaction with their educational background, language skills and presence of dependents and that was a barrier in their adjustment experiences. The study also reported strategies employed by the participants to serve and address their financial, emotional, social, cultural and academic needs during their adjustment. Finally, it was important to highlight from the data, the students' individual characteristics and the institutional characteristics that were reported to support or challenge their adjustment experience. The study's two theoretical models were used to provide clarity and reasoning behind the findings. In the following Chapter 6, implications for practice and suggested further areas of research based on the findings were presented. Although the presence of implications for some findings may not be possible, it is important to point out that one of the

unique benefits of the study is to build on the limited literature on Saudi women by providing an objective insight to the adjustment experiences of Saudi women studying in doctoral programs in the U.S.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the research questions, highlights from relevant literature, research methods, and findings from this study. In the last sections of this chapter, conclusions from this research, along with recommendations for practice and research related to the acculturation of Saudi female doctoral students in the U.S. Following the last chapter, a brief epilogue was included that describes the reflections of the researcher undertaking this research as she too was a Saudi female doctoral student.

#### **Summary of the Previous Chapters**

This section summarized the previous five chapters of this study. The first chapter focused on establishing the rationale behind conducting this study. The chapter focused on the educational developments in Saudi. It presented information related to the investments of the Saudi government to provide quality higher education opportunities to its citizens. This was done through scholarship programs like the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) and other funding opportunities that were provided to faculty members of Saudi governmental universities. A number of these Saudi scholars choose the U.S. as their study destination due to its reputation as a world leader in many research fields including those in Sciences and Humanities. However, when the scholars move to the U.S., apart from their academic challenges, they also face the challenge of adjusting in the U.S. These challenges were more pronounced for Saudi female students because the cultural difference between females in Saudi and the U.S. is far larger than that between males in Saudi and in the U.S. The adjustment issues these women encounter had an impact on the overall experience of Saudi female students in the U.S. To understand the

problem better, two well-known models were presented. Berry's Acculturation Model and Hofstede's National Cultural Model were used to inform this study. These models provide an excellent platform for studying the factors related to the adjustment of Saudi female students in the U.S. The research questions used in this study included:

1-What were the biggest barriers and support factors associated with successful acculturation of Saudi Women? How did the barriers or supportive factors differ for Saudi women from different parts of Saudi (if all)?

2-What strategies were most successful in helping Saudi women adjust to studying in the United States?

3-What institutional characteristics (external) or individual characteristics (internal) were related to helping Saudi Women adjust?

In Chapter 2, a literature review of the related work is presented. In this context, Hofstede's National Cultural Model is presented first. Hofstede presents six different indexes to define a culture or society. These include: Power Distance Index, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Long-Term Orientation, and Indulgence. The other model is Berry's Acculturation Model. Berry describes four different adjustment modes: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. After describing the two relevant models, Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the adjustment of international students. Because the research on Saudi female doctoral students in the U.S. is limited, this study includes relevant research on all international students as well as research on women from the Gulf States region, and Saudi when available. This body of research includes the following key findings. Students' experiences were influenced by the presence of different stressors or factors. International students face different acculturation stressors than those faced

by the U.S. students. Findings specifically related to the acculturation of SFGS are: Hijab, nationality & religion, the mehram, level of understanding of English language and the U.S. culture, level of family support, and prior intercultural experience. Finally, important characteristics of U.S. universities in the context of the acculturation of SFGS were also identified from the literature. These include student orientation, international student support services, English language tutoring programs and workshops, curriculum with international perspective and supportive faculty, and interaction with U.S. students.

In Chapter 3, the research methodology is described. In particular, it includes a description of the research methods including the research design, the criteria for selection of participants, and the data analytic techniques and reporting tools used during this research. In terms of research methods, qualitative, ethnographic, and criticalist approaches were employed. For ensuring data validity, peer-debriefing is used with the help of two peer-reviewers: a domestic student and a Saudi student. Thirteen Saudi female doctoral students were selected for this study. For data collection, audio recordings were used. Each participant was interviewed at least twice. The interview questions were set with the help of Weissman's 1999 Social Adjustment Scale - Self Report (SAS-SR). The interviews were conducted in both English and Arabic and the Arabic parts were translated to English. The responses of the participants were transcribed by listening to the audio recordings and major and minor themes were extracted from these transcriptions. The decision of identifying a major or minor theme was based on a number of factors including the number of participants who mention the issue, the amount of time a participant takes to emphasize an issue and/or the number of times an issue was repeated by a participant. For data analysis and reporting, Carspecken reconstructive analysis technique (Carspecken, 1996) was used. This method was based on three steps: meaning field analysis,

pragmatic horizon analysis, and coding.

In Chapter 4, detailed profiles of each of the 13 participants were presented. The exact ages of participants were not mentioned as it could lead to identification. The participants were divided into two groups based on their marital status. Ten of the participants were married while three of them were single. Another category is that of participants having children and those who did not have children. A total of nine participants had children while four had no children. The participants were also grouped based on their region of origin in Saudi Arabia. Nine of the participants came from the Central region of Saudi while four came from the Western region. Another category is that of Sciences and Humanities major students. Eight of the interviewed participants were Science majors while five were Humanities majors. Lastly, the participants were grouped according to the number of years spent in the U.S. during the time they pursued doctoral degrees. Three participants had lived in the U.S. between one to four years, seven participants had lived in the U.S. between five to seven years, two participants lived in the U.S. for more than seven years and one participant had been in the U.S. for more than ten years. Participant responses were presented in a chronological order of events that influenced their acculturation experience in the U.S.

In Chapter 5, the findings of this research were reported. The findings emphasized issues important to the SFGS during their adjustment to a new environment. Many of the reported findings were tied to issues that surfaced in related literature highlighted in Chapter 2.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The findings of the study were discussed in detail in Chapter 5. In this section, a summary of the major findings is presented. The findings were summarized and presented here in three sets. The first set of findings were related to the barriers and support factors reported by

the participants. The second set of findings were related to the strategies used by the participants. The third set of findings were related to the participants' individual characteristics and institutional characteristics.

The first set of findings revealed in the study were the three major factors that affected the adjustment process of the Saudi female doctoral students. The first factor was the participants' educational backgrounds. The data revealed that there was an overall dissatisfaction expressed by all 13 participants with their educational backgrounds. The second factor was their English language skills. Results reveal that strong English language skills helped the participants to adjust in their new environment. Finally, the third factor was the presence or absence of dependents. Most of the women indicated that the support they received from their dependents were appreciated and had a positive impact on their adjustment experience.

About the second set of findings, the data revealed different plans and strategies used by the participants to support their adjustment process. Although several methods were employed by the Saudi female doctoral students in the study, data from the interviews indicated the important effect of two main strategies: reaching out and seeking relationships. The plan to reach out included three different approaches: proactivity in locating appropriate resources, accepting different variations of family support and seeking support from different members of the campus community. Seeking relationships with members of the host and home community was the second important strategy employed by the participants of the study.

The third set of findings were organized to fall under two areas: the individual characteristics and institutional characteristics. The institutional characteristics described the different aspects of the institution that provided the participants with either supportive or challenging experiences. The first interactions with the broad institutional departments were



defined by welcoming programs and legal services. Whether an informational session or orientation was provided, all participants agreed on the positive impact of the initial welcoming program services. The programs offered the students a feeling of safety as the program staff insured the legality of the student's status and completion of their documents. Participants' opinions differed on the supportive or challenging nature of the effect of their academic department on their adjustment experience. Participants reported different experiences during their engagement with the departments' staff, cohort and professors. Although negative and positive experiences existed with both the staff and the cohort, the majority of the participants commented on the effect of their professors' support or lack of it, indicating its significance. This is an expected result from the Saudi students because of their teacher centered educational system back home.

From a constructivist point of view, it was important to take into consideration the existing knowledge of the participant. In relation to the final set of findings, the study asked questions about the participants backgrounds. The students' responses highlighted three important characteristics that effected their adjustment experience. Students who traveled to western countries before their study abroad experience and students with previous work experience found their past experiences to be helpful in adjusting to their new environment. Students familiar with the western culture had realistic expectations while previously employed students were proactive and knowledgeable of existing resources. The third individual characteristic was related to the adherence of the students to their home culture and societal norms. Students who adhered to the norms found more home culture and societal support than the students who did not maintain the values of their home culture. This is not to say that the absence of the support created a barrier for the participants' adjustments, specifically for the

participants that did not see a significance of the home culture or societal support. Also, it is important to note that the results reveal that the experiences of majority of the participants prove the presence of dependents to be a supportive factor to the adjustment experience of the Saudi female doctoral students. However, in regards to the finding related to the effect of the individual's home culture and societal support, it was obvious that the results vary according to the type of dependent. One of the themes reported in the third set of findings revealed the important effect of societal and home cultural support. In the Saudi collectivist society, close, strong and dependent relationships exist between members of the society. The Saudi culture is characterized by its strong adherence to traditional cultural norms and offence to those norms could cause shaming or ostracizing. If a member of the society physically separates through traveling or moving to another country, adherence to the norms of the collectivist nature continues to be expected. As in any patriarchal society, the expectation is that men are the main decision makers and are responsible for addressing all family needs. As presented in the data, Saudi families displayed concern for females studying abroad. One reason for this could be the belief among some people that women may not be able to handle the challenges and responsibilities of living alone. The accompanying societal backlash for not adhering to the norms reinforces their concern. It is worth noting that all but two participants had husbands. six of the 11 participants indicated that the presence of a husband as a dependent was necessary reassurance that they followed the cultural norms. In doing that, they gained societal and home cultural support that served as a positive factor for their adjustment process. Apart from the key findings, there were three expected findings from the literature which were not supported by this study. These include the roles of Mehram, Hijab/Niqab, and religion in the adjustment of SFGS in the U.S. It was expected that these three factors would be identified as barriers for adjustment

but this study did not identify them as barriers. In fact, the study found that having a Mehram is not a requirement for the Saudi institutional scholarships. Similarly, the study did not find any evidence of SFGS facing difficulties in adjustment due to their Hijab/ Niqab. With respect to religion, contrary to expectation, many SFGS find it helpful. They find strength in it. On the other hand, many SFGS were of the opinion that religion and culture were two different things and it is the strict culture that sometimes makes adjustment difficult for SFGS.

### **Implications and Policy Suggestions**

Participants of the study revealed that their lack of sufficient educational background was a barrier to their adjustment experience. Lack of academic research skills and weak English language skills were highlighted to be most problematic. Similarly, lack of prior international travel experience was found to be a barrier. Participants revealed strategies like reaching out to seeking campus support and institutional characteristics like initial welcoming programs and departmental concerns to affect their adjustment experience. Within these different Institutional related aspects, the effect of professors' support was considered to be highly effective. In the remaining section, the implications of these findings were discussed and policy suggestions were presented.

The absence of strong English language skills proved to be a strong barrier to the adjustment process of the Saudi female doctoral students studying in the U.S. This result from the study is consistent with the previous reported results in the literature relating international student challenges with their level of language skills. All participants indicated the importance of their language skills in their adjustment. The confidence in their ability to communicate using strong language skills allowed positive adjustment experience. In contrast, the remaining participants found their weak language skills as a challenging factor that served as a barrier in

their adjustment process. Sponsorship programs would benefit the sponsored student's adjustment experience by mandating the presence of a high level of language proficiency before the student travels to study abroad. Not only would the step of insuring language competency benefit the student but students may experience less challenges during their adjustment. The sponsorship program would also benefit from saving resources by limiting the time needed in the U.S. to benefit from the language learning programs.

The internet was described as the most reliable and frequently used resource by the participants of this study. In the current time of feasible and fast changing electronic information, accuracy and accessibility of information are vital. Formal sponsorship organizations would benefit from frequent periodical updates of their websites and the ability to easily connect with available informed and experienced staff. Policies should be clear and encompass all past experiences and predicted situations. The organizations would benefit from creating a clear goal to insure policies and procedures are preventive and not reactive. Creating a safe area for the students and even host institutions, to share complications and challenges in a practical and organized method would be a valuable resource for preventive policies. In addition to satisfactory services, the information could be used to generate an easy-to-use electronic guide useful for perspective or current students or host institutions. The guide would also give realistic expectations for institutions that are hosting or looking to host the sponsored students. The authors of the guide should take into perspective the participants of the study. They should understand that although culturally prescribed gender roles exist, they should consider the different perspectives of both genders. Moreover, to insure a culturally sensitive guide, it is important that the authors have knowledge of both the host and home cultures and their differences.

The results of the study confirmed traveling to Western countries before the study abroad experience as an important supportive factor to the student's adjustment experience. It is safe to confirm as a fact that traveling abroad is considered a luxury that is not available to all because of expenses and even cultural and societal reasons. It would be difficult to require a perspective student's experience related to traveling to Western countries. However, existing resources in the student's home country could be used to offer the students some of the benefits associated with the traveling experience without physically traveling. The advertised services on the website of the U.S. Department of State international EducationUSA centers include "offering accurate, unbiased, comprehensive, objective and timely information about educational institutions in the United States." ("About EducationUSA", n.d.). In addition to these services, EducationUSA could use their existing resources to help students intending to study in the U.S. and had never traveled abroad, expose them to similar experiences associated with traveling to Western countries. This could be done by providing opportunities for the perspective students to interact with members of the expat society. The multicultural experience of the expat members of the society could be an added benefit as they could provide responses to questions with a cultural comparative aspect. Concerns related to interaction with foreign entities could be addressed by implementing different strategies. Strict precautions could be implemented by insuring that the services are being offered to students that are indeed traveling to study and have all the paperwork as proof of their upcoming travel abroad experience. Another method to avoid complications could be by holding the sessions in areas separate from the governmental entities. The literature confirms the presence of programs involving foreign entities in the home culture that effectively served perspective international students. In Carson's 2008 report on the existing literature on international post graduate students, he reported details of a 1991 pre-departure

orientation program for Malawi students. The program's goal addressed aspects related to social and academic acculturation. Students that attended the program reported positive effects of the program on their study abroad experience. For practical implication related to the study's results, it would be beneficial to learn that the main objectives of the program were to create an understanding of the hosts' governmental regulations and policies, provide strategies on adjusting to the new host culture and develop familiarity with different academic related aspects: academic advisor, program of study, study habits, research skills, student organizations and the international student offices. For the institutions in the US, one suggestion for obtaining benefits of the travel experience could be a simple and practical technique of a buddy program. Students from the same home country or from a country with similar cultural backgrounds could be paired up with the perspective students. With the presence of feasible electronic connection applications and programs, connecting the students could happen before the students even start their study abroad experience. This way students could get as clear as an idea and expectation of the western society without leaving the country.

There were examples in Chapter 2 that emphasized on the importance of cultural awareness and the intercultural competence on the adjustment of international students (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012). For practical implication purposes, understanding the results of the study lead the researcher to list Amsberry's (2008, p.356) practical advice for faculty on good practice with international students to address the challenges identified in the results. For example, knowing the linguistic proficiency and understanding some cultural aspects of the student by engaging with them in a one-on-one meeting before classes begin. This is important because in cases with merit based sponsored students, professors must allow for the possibility that the students' challenges are linguistic and not intellectual. Knowledge of the source of the problem

will guide the professors to modify aspects of the teaching and learning experience to accommodate the needs of the students without compromising the needs of the other students as well. Professors could alter classroom instruction to include more references of the international culture to make the material more relatable. The professor could also provide extra time for the international students to give guidance on research skills and even to confirm comprehension of the knowledge discussed. This could include providing resources or show work samples to become more familiar with the required research skills. The professor could also use the time to explain vocabulary or cultural references or phrases that are part of the host culture's understanding. One of Amsberry (2008) points clarify how some cultures highly value teachers as holders of knowledge and consider questioning a teacher as disrespectful. This is similar to the characteristic of the Saudi educational system. Amber emphasizes the importance of receiving a verbal sign confirming comprehension: "Avoid assuming that a nod or a yes from a student indicates comprehension" (Amsberry, 2008, p. 356). In an institution that looks to diversify its student campus and retain their international students, faculty developmental sessions targeting intercultural competence is vital. There could be dedicated sessions assigned during Faculty Council meetings where faculty had the opportunity to share experiences of challenges or successful methods related to teaching and learning experiences. The experiences could provide others with insights on cultural practices that are observed to be offensive or even helpful in aiding a learning and teaching moment. The experiences could also provide the professors with opportunities to create relationships and engage with their students while observing the culture norms of the student's home cultures and values. The collective experiences shared followed by a summarized shared report of the meetings results could be a great value in creating culturally aware faculty that serve as a supportive factor to the international students.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

It is normal for open-ended questions in qualitative research to produce information not related to the study but provide potential areas for further research. Some suggestions for future work are presented below.

In relation to challenging and supportive factors, one interesting finding was the effect of the presence of a sponsorship. Historically, challenging issues reported by Saudi students studying in the U.S. in the 80s and 70s revealed financial challenges. The previous Saudi students reported their sponsorship amounts to be insufficient in covering all their household needs. Participants of this study also reported financial challenges but from a different point of view, where the difficulty was related to budgeting. One reason behind the repeated presence of financial issues is perhaps associated with one of the dimensions in Hofstede's model that describes the cultures of both the Western and Central regions of Saudi as 'indulgent'. This, besides many other behaviors, also refers to the presence of unnecessary spending. In this study, all 13 participants were supervised and financially supported by a Saudi governmental organization. There were no participants who were not financially supported. An interesting area of further study could investigate whether the absence of a sponsorship body could be indicative of adjustment stress for the Saudi female doctoral student.

Berry's Acculturation Model could be extended to fit accommodate the unique case of the Saudi female. The model in its current form cannot fully apply to the Saudi doctoral female students. Modification based on the findings in the study could help the model to be more applicable. Berry's Model of acculturation cannot adequately cover the adjustment process of the Saudi female doctoral international student. For example, the model did not take into consideration the aspect of faith as a factor in choosing the acculturation mode. As indicated by



the participants, religion and culture were not the same. Being loyal to the culture by adhering to the cultural norms based on the collectivist nature of the society is not the same as being loyal to your religious values.

Another aspect is that the model is not fit for Saudi international students. The acculturation mode is made to look as the final mode of adjustment. However, international student's acculturation process continues as they return to their home country. Many of the participants indicated an uneasy feeling about returning after graduation. None of the participants reported their intention after graduation to take advantage of the OPT (Optional Practical Training) as an opportunity to extend their learning experience in the U.S. As most of the participants intend to return to Saudi, an extension to the Berry Model of Acculturation is needed to address the emerging issue that accompany the continuing need to adjust to their surroundings. This is an opportunity for further research to understand what the literature on international students' mobility termed "Reverse Culture Shock".

Another suggestion for future research is the extension of Hofstede's National Cultural Model. Regional cultures of the Saudi society are unique. The Saudi female is even different in comparison to the females of the other Arab Gulf countries (generally had similar cultural norms). Although Hofstede's dimensions were initially created for business and work environments, they had been repeatedly used in literature comparing cultures. However, because of the dominant male work environments in Saudi, the dimensions seem to be more descriptive for a male only population than for environment that includes women or is solely made up of women. For example, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions do not take into consideration the extent of female leadership presence in a society. The findings of the study indicated that participants with mothers who worked or volunteered outside their homes were more likely to be motivated

to be independent in their new environment. Female students supported by a female role model may likely face less challenges when adjusting to their new environment. This could help organizations that sponsor and send Saudi female students to obtain their doctoral degrees from the U.S., like the Saudi Ministry of Education, to actively prepare the student using existing female leaders from the Saudi society. The role models could help the organizations determine when the female student is ready for her experience to study abroad. It is important to point out the important role of Berry's Acculturation Model and Hofstede's Model on National Culture had in explaining the reason behind the finding related to regions. Although the models explained the possible cause behind the findings, the cause itself proved to point to a flaw in one of the key concepts of Berry's Acculturation Model. According to the participants from the Central region, the presence of a wider cultural gap did not prove to provide more acculturative stress than for the participants from the Western region with a less cultural gap between their regional culture and the U.S. host culture.

Moreover, the existing literature review points to certain factors that did not appear in the data collected. Understanding the reasons behind the absence of evidence related to the recurring issues in the literature merit further investigation. For example, it was a surprise that the data did not point to any negative effects of the Mehram requirement on the ability of females to study abroad. It was surprising since it was one of the main points of discussion in many local and international newspapers and on social media platforms. Another unexpected finding, was the absence of reported challenges related to wearing the Islamic and cultural covers like the Hijab and Niqab. Although existing research points to the Islamic cover as a major challenge for Muslim women in the U.S., there was no emphasis on this issue in the participant's responses. These findings merit further research. The following issues need to be investigated

further: (1) definitions of success for international students, (2) a global comparison of Muslim and Arab female study abroad students' acculturation experiences, and (3) the effect of global issues on the behaviors of both the home and host cultures towards each other.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study were mostly found during the process of the data analysis. The validity of the data was at risk and the researcher decided to do the analysis without the NVivo qualitative analysis tool. Reoccurrence of code switching between the Arabic and the English language was the main reason behind the inability to benefit from the use of NVivo. The tool is limited in its functions to fully process data presented in the Arabic language in comparison with the data presented in English. In addition to missing some parts of the data during the analysis, actions and visuals which were used to facilitate the reporting of the findings were also problematic. To solve the issue and to continue using NVivo, the researcher decided to translate all the data to English. It was the researcher's belief that translations between languages would not represent an accurate translation of meaning. From the researcher's previous experience when translating between Arabic and English, the researcher observed that misunderstandings happened due to the different cultures associated with the two languages. This was found to be true in this study as well where the translations of the participants' responses were in many instances inaccurate representations of their meanings in the Arabic language. This was important to note because 90% of the conversations took place in Arabic. Hence, the researcher decided to analyze the data using her knowledge of both languages and then reported the findings in English, consistent with the university's medium of language.

The experience of the researcher and her close connection to the participants could be considered a limitation of this study. It is important to mention that the researcher and the

participants were all Saudi nationals studying in doctoral programs in the U.S. This fact could have affected the results and/or the analysis because of the possible presence of any biases. It is possible that the findings would have resonated in different ways than with another researcher. The researcher's experience could have also influenced the questions asked in the study and interviews. This limitation is due to a possible bias that might have led to considering some parts of the data to be more valuable than others.

## **Conclusion**

The understanding that came from observing the self-reported experiences of SFGS is an important addition to the literature on international student adjustment. Learning from students who showed resilience during a major change of adjusting to a new society could help practitioners working to develop support for this student population.

Individual differences are expected to exist in many situations and it is also expected that organizations that support international students cannot address every need of every student. However, it is important for individuals and organizations to acknowledge the existence and importance of the international student's cultural background. When creating support programs for adjusting international students, O'Conner emphasizes the importance of recognizing the complexity in the nature of different cultures (2015).

Moreover, this study offered suggestions to programs with a goal to maximize the overall effort of supporting student programs that are intended for international students during their adjustment process. The framework of existing models and theories on student adjustment do not fit the observed participants' experiences reported in this study. However, with modifications based on the understanding of the Saudi female doctoral student adjustment experience, the existing models and theories may be applicable.

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## Appendix A: Approved IRB Letter

KC IRB  
Protocol #: 1701860946  
Investigator: McCormick, Alexander C.  
Summary Printed 01/25/2017

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### KC IRB Protocol Summary

**Protocol Number:** 1701860946

**Title:** Factors Affecting the Acculturation of Saudi Female Graduate Students in a US Mid-Western Research University

**Status:** Exempt

**Expiration Date:**

**Last Approval Date:**

**Investigator:** McCormick, Alexander C.

#### Protocol Details

**Type:** Exempt

**Application Date:** 01/20/2017

**IU or Investigator held  
IND/IDE?**

**FDA Application No:**

#### Attachments

Description	Attachment Type	Last Updated	Updated By
Letter of Invitation - Revised and modified according to suggestions received after initial submission	Recruitment Materials	01/19/2017 18:42:47	abar
Interview Protocol	Data Collection Instrument	01/20/2017 10:14:21	apneel
Revised and modified according to suggestions after initial submission	Study Information Sheet	01/19/2017 18:41:41	abar

### IRB APPROVAL

This research project, including all noted attachments, has been reviewed and approved by the Indiana University IRB.

☒ Exempt Category(ies), if applicable: (2)

☐ Expedited Category(ies), if applicable:

Authorized IRB Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ IRB Approval Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of IRB Member: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Letter of Invitation to Study Participants**

Dear Saudi Female Doctoral Student of IU,

I am a doctoral candidate in Higher Education and Student Affairs in the School of Education at Indiana University-Bloomington. My dissertation explores the factors affecting the acculturation of Saudi Female Doctoral Students (SFDS) in a U.S. mid-western research university. As a component of my research, I am conducting interviews with Saudi female doctoral students.

Two to three interviews will be held, each lasting approximately 60 minutes and will be guided by a set of interview questions. The questions will be open-ended to encourage a more conversational atmosphere and allow space for you to contribute information that I may have overlooked when creating the interview questions.

If you would like additional information concerning this research before deciding to participate, please contact me by email at [abar@indiana.edu](mailto:abar@indiana.edu), or by phone at (812) 391-7115.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Office in conjunction with IU's Institutional Review Board (IRB Study #1701860946). However, the final decision to participate is entirely yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact the IU Institutional Review Board office at [irb@iu.edu](mailto:irb@iu.edu) or by phone at (812) 856-4242

I am also attaching a consent form for your review. We will review this statement again in person prior to the interview, at which time I will ask for your signature.

I plan to contact you during the week of February 20, 2017, to answer any questions you may have about the study and, and if you consent, to schedule the interview.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Abeer Bar, Ph.D. Candidate  
Higher Education and Student Affairs  
School of Education  
Indiana University

## **Appendix C: Study Information Sheet**

### **INDIANA UNIVERSITY STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR**

#### **Factors affecting the Acculturation of Saudi Female Graduate Students in a U.S. Mid-Western Research University**

**Abeer Bar**

You are invited to participate in a research study of the Saudi female graduate student acculturation process. You were selected as a possible subject because you are a Saudi female graduate student in a U.S. Mid-Western research university. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. The study is being conducted by Abeer Bar and Dr. Alex McCormick from the Higher Education program in the School of Education at Indiana University.

#### **STUDY PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges and supporting factors that affect the adjustment of the Saudi female graduate student studying in a U.S. Mid-Western research university.

#### **NUMBER OF PEOPLE TAKING PART IN THE STUDY**

If you agree to participate, you will be one of 13 subjects who will be participating in this research.

#### **PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY**

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

1. Answer interview questions related to your adjustment process in the U.S. environment.
2. Clarify the supporting and/or challenging factors that have affected your level of adjustment.
3. The interview can be held face to face in location and time agreed on by researcher and Saudi graduate student.
4. The interview can be held via phone call at time agreed on by researcher and Saudi graduate student
5. Two to three interviews will be held; each interview will last an hour.
6. The interviews will be audio recorded. No information related to identity of the participant will be recorded.

#### **RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY**

While on the study, the risks and/or discomforts are:

1. A risk of completing the interview due to being uncomfortable answering the questions.
2. A risk of possible loss of confidentiality.
3. Measures that will be employed to minimize the risks and/or discomforts listed above:
  - a. While completing the interview, you can tell the researcher that you feel uncomfortable or do not want to answer a particular question.

#### **BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY**

There are no direct benefits to participation.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. No one will have access to audio recording except the researcher and the subject speaking in the audio data. The recordings will be used for the study and will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) etc., who may need to access your research records.

**PAYMENT**

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

**CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Abeer Bar, at 8123917115.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or offer input, contact the IU Human Subjects Office at 812-856-4242 or 800-696-2949.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THIS STUDY**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with the U.S. Mid-Western research university.

## **Appendix D: Interview Protocol**

### **Interview Protocol Brief Interview**

#### **Factors affecting the Acculturation of Saudi Female Graduate Students in a U.S. Mid-Western Research University**

##### **Demographic Information:**

1. Participant's Name:
2. Participant's Pseudonym:
3. Socio-economic Status
  - a. US Annual Household Income Range: Below \$10,000/ From \$10,000 to \$20,000/  
From \$20,000 to \$30,000/ From \$30,000 to \$40,000/ From \$40,000 to \$50,000/  
More than \$50,000
  - b. Saudi Monthly Household Income Range: lower than SR10500 or higher
4. Age:
5. Marital Status:
6. Have Children (Yes/ No):
7. Region of Origin:
8. Preferred language (English/ Arabic):
9. Length of stay in the U.S. (in years):
10. Relatives in the U.S. (Yes/No):
11. Friends in the U.S. (Yes/No):



## **Topic Domain: Social Adjustment – preparations and expectations**

1. Lead Question: Tell me about yourself and about your move to the US. How would you describe your moving experience?

### **Possible Follow-up Questions:**

1. I am impressed that you made such a big move and I want to understand more about your motivation to go ahead with this change.
2. Tell me about your family
3. What did you do in Saudi before you came to the US?
4. What are your ambitions? What did/do you want from this move? Why was this a good step to take?
5. Tell me about your preparations for your move.
6. What support system did you find to help you make the move to the US?
7. Did you previously have any international experience?
  - a. (If YES) what was the reason you traveled and for how long? What do you remember?
  - b. (If No) why was that?
8. Tell me a story about a time that was not so positive about this move.
9. How were you feeling about the amount of information you received during orientation?
10. Did the city you moved to meet your expectations? How did you feel when you first arrived?
11. What did you think you wanted to find when you got to your department and met your advisor? What were your expectations?

12. How did you feel in your class?
13. Did you make friends with your local/international classmates?
14. Can you tell me how much the Saudi community had role and helped in your transition?
15. How is your home/region different than the US?
16. How long have you been here now? Do you feel you have changed? Can you use the things/skills/experience you gained here back in Saudi?
17. What challenges did you face before, during and after your move?
18. What contributed more to these challenges? (prompt(s): children, family to support, language barriers, housing difficulties, financial issues and cultural differences)
19. Do you feel like you went through stages of adjustment? If yes, can you describe them?
20. Can you give me an example of a time where you felt you were not prepared to face a challenge?
21. What did you do to adjust and cope? What were the (internal/external) turning points?
22. Did anything help or support you in facing these challenges? (prompt(s): personal characteristics, religious beliefs and values, social networking, language, family support, community support or any other support)
23. Did you seek support? (prompt(s): Saudi cultural office, office of international services, friends, family, religious services, community centers, professional mental health services, etc.)
24. (If the student went to an English Language Preparatory program) What did you do your time at the institute – how much progress did you make? Did you feel that your teacher/classmates understood the cultural differences?
25. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities? Tell me about your experience.

26. Tell me about the people at your department/ university/neighborhood/ society – among these, who is the most memorable person to you? Was there a time that you felt that they did not understand you or a time that you connected?
27. What kind of feelings do you have about staying and working in the U.S. after graduation?
28. Do you want to add anything else?

**Notes:**

Covert Categories of Interest: metaphors used to discuss transitional phase, relationship of language abilities and success, expectations of a support system, perceived discrimination based on nationality or language ability or scholarship assistance, commitment to the goal of learning the language, signs of burnout or performance slump, relationship between role of media and image as a Saudi student, emergence of an identity confusion, any acknowledgment that her time at the university was beneficial or is a waste.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

### **PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION**

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- Name: Abeer Abdulmanan Bar
- E-mail: aa.abar@gmail.com

### **WORK EXPERIENCE**

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- Enhancement Centers Manager, EFFAT UNIVERSITY Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

October 2008 – July 2011

- Managed the Enhancement Centers; Effat University's co-curricular and liberal arts component: Independent Learning Center, Career Development Office, and Center of Communication and Rhetoric.
- Developed and managed Centers' co-curricular services.
- Managed and co-developed Effat Ambassador Program to provide graduate with skills complying with Effat University Learning Goals "IQRAA".
- Offered career services to all current and graduate students.
- Designed services for Graduate Outreach Program.
- Managed annual Effat Alumni Reunion.
- Managed internship and training programs.
- Allocated internship and training placements
- Pursued new employers for training and employment opportunities.
- Managed annual Effat Career Day public event with more than 500 attendees and one of Effat university's largest income resources.
- Managed annual International Education Fair.
- Managed American Education Fair.

- Initiated and managed annual Reading Day event.
  - Initiated and managed Effat Toast Masters club.
  - Established programs assisted by foreign governmental and educational entities.
  - Initiated policies and programs ensuring services aligned and served academic department goals.
  - Managed documents submission for National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), Saudi Ministry of Higher Education.
  - Modified Center's goals to agree with NCAAA Quality Framework.
  - Worked with Mount Holyoke College consultants to insure quality standards of Centers' co-curricular programs.
- Certified Spring Board Trainer, BRITISH COUNCIL Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
November 2007 – November 2010
    - Nominated and sponsored by British Council to receive training from Spring-Board founders in Devon, UK.
    - Delivered local (Saudi) and overseas four-week workshops.
    - Assisted participants in volunteering in local community serving programs.
    - Assigned speakers that were audience appropriate and active members of the society.
  - Assistant, Career Development Office (CDO), EFFAT COLLEGE Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
September 2005 – August 2006
    - Developed semester program serving office's academic goals.
    - Outsourced experienced professionals to present program's workshops.
    - Presented student workshops.
    - Advised students on developing CVs.

- Assisted students with internship placements.
  - Developed and managed student events.
  - Initiated and managed first annual International Educational Fair.
  - Initiated and managed CDO periodical publication.
  - Create sponsorship and training opportunities with public and private entities.
  - Created CDO document management system and issued periodical reports to President's Office.
  - Supervised Effat University's first American Educational Fair.
- Assistant, Student Affairs, EFFAT COLLEGE Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
September 2004 – August 2005
    - Assisted Dean of Student Affairs in administrative responsibilities.
    - Managed Student Affairs document management system.
    - Trained Student Affairs new staff.
  - Assistant, Communication Center, Deans Office, EFFAT COLLEGE Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
February 2004 – August 2004
    - Responsible for university business incoming and outgoing communication.
    - Assisted in administrative responsibilities for Dean's Office.
  - Assistant, Finance Department, EFFAT COLLEGE Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
September 2003 – February 2004
    - Assisted Dean of Finance in administrative responsibilities.
    - Created university wide document management system guidebook.
    - Worked with document management consultants to insure compliance with quality standards.

- Trained staff to utilize document management system.
- English Language Instructor, SAUDI CULTURAL CENTER Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
June 2000 – August 2003
  - Taught Multiple levels of English as a Foreign Language courses (covering reading, writing and conversation skills).
  - Applied teaching methods based on Applied Linguistic learning theories.
  - Planned and managed Center's social events.

## INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS EXPERIENCE

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- Steering Committee Member, 2017 Colloquium for Women of IU, Women's Philanthropy at Indiana University, IU Foundation, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON  
Indiana, United States  
June 2015
- Advisor, Abdullah Alamri Cultural Meetup (AASCM), INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON Indiana, United States  
October 2016 – Present
- Schedule Coordinator and Cultural Advisor to IU First Lady, IU Presidential Visit to Saudi Arabia, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON Indiana, United States  
April 2013 – April 2014
- Female Representative, Indiana University Saudi Alumni, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON Indiana, United States  
April 2013 – April 2014
- President, Saudi Student Association, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON  
Indiana, United States

April 2013 – April 2014

- Reviewer, Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives Journal, ZAYED UNIVERSITY United Arab Emirates

September 2012 – Present

- Head of Cultural and Reception Committee, Annual Gala Event, INTERNATIONAL QURAN CENTER Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

February 2007 – April 2007

- Consultant, Middle Eastern Broadcasting Channel MBC4 “IMATTER” Project, EFFAT COLLEGE Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

September 2006 – December 2006

## EDUCATION

---

- Doctorate of Philosophy, Major: Higher Education, Educational Leadership Policy Department. Minor: Literacy Culture and Language Education. School of Education, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON Indiana, United States

December 2017

- Institutional Research Certificate, Higher Education Student Affairs Program, Educational Leadership Policy Department, School of Education, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON Indiana, United States

December 2017

- Masters of Arts Degree, European Languages of English Linguistics. Faculty of Arts and Humanities, KING ABDULAZIZ UNIVERSITY Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

June 2008



- Spring Board Trainer License, SPRINGBOARD CONSULTANCY                      Devon, England  
November 2007
- Bachelor of Arts Degree: European Language of English Literature, Faculty of Arts and  
Humanities, KING ABDULAZIZ UNIVERSITY                      Jeddah, Saudi Arabia  
June 2001

## SKILLS

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- Computer literate (Microsoft Office; Word, Excel, Power Point, etc...).
- Excellent oral & written communication skills.
- Capable of managing and prioritizing multiple tasks.
- Strong interpersonal and organizational skills.
- Capable of planning and managing events.
- Can thrive in both team environment and autonomously.
- "Can-Do" attitude.
- Experienced in Document Management.
- Spoken languages: English, Arabic and Uzbek

## MEMBERSHIP

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Organization	Member Since
NAFSA: Association for International Educators	September 2014
Institute of International Education (IIE)	June 2014
Association for the Study of Higher Education	November 2013
NESMA Toast Master Club, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	June 2007
American Businessmen of Jeddah (ABJ), Saudi Arabia	September 2004
Jeddah Businesswomen Group, Chamber of Commerce, Saudi Arabia	April 2004
Saudi German Business Group (SGBG), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	January 2004

## REFERENCES

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Available Upon Request